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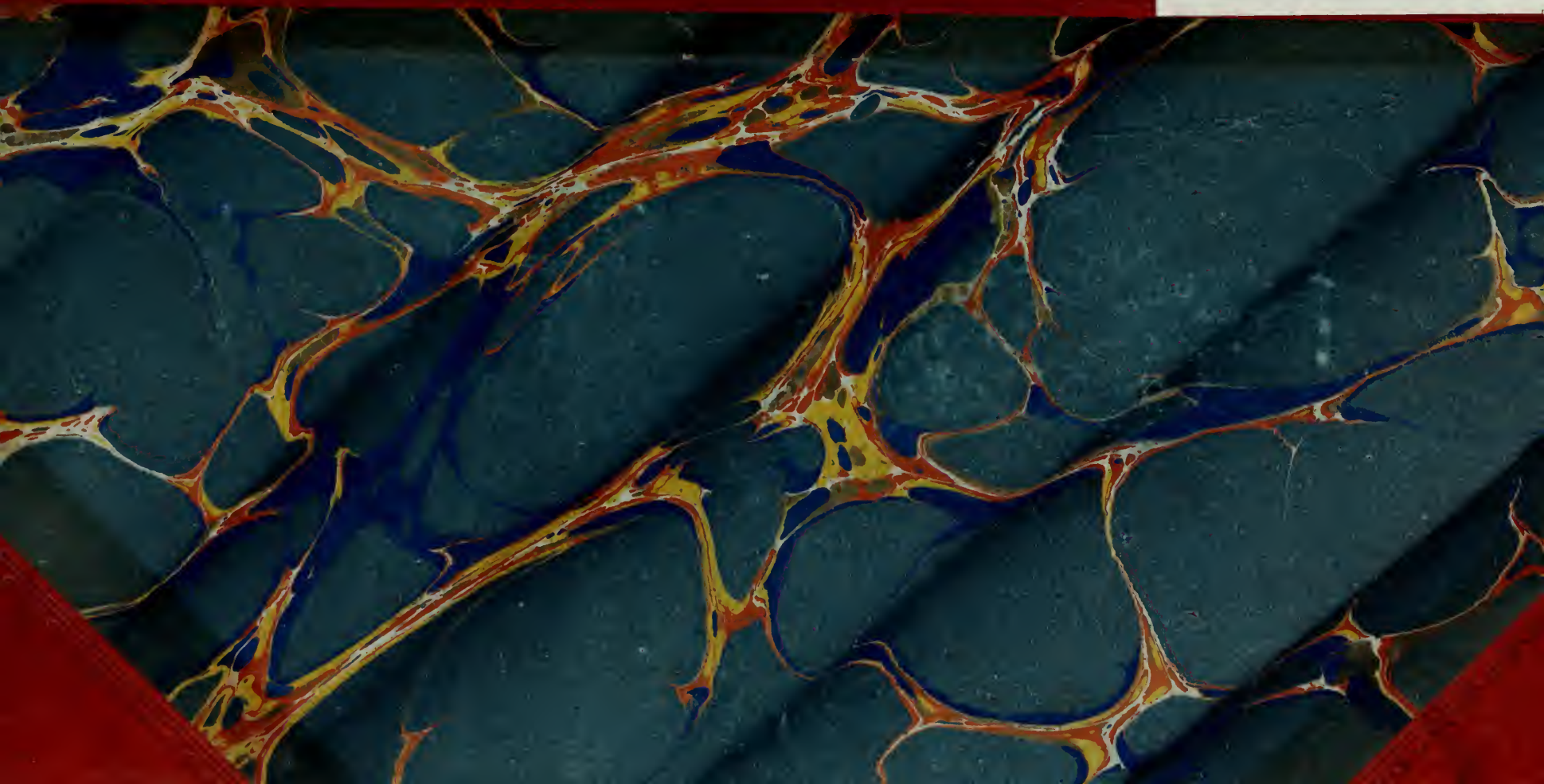

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M. L. GOW. R. TAYLOR.

"PLAY THE 'JUBILATI' FOR ME," SHE WHISPERED, "AND OPEN WIDE THE CASEMEN

"*Laden with Golden Grain.*"

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THE

# ARGOSY.

EDITED BY

CHARLES W. WOOD.

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VOLUME LII.

*July to December*, 1891.

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RICHARD BENTLEY & SON,
8, NEW BURLINGTON STREET, LONDON, W.
Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty.

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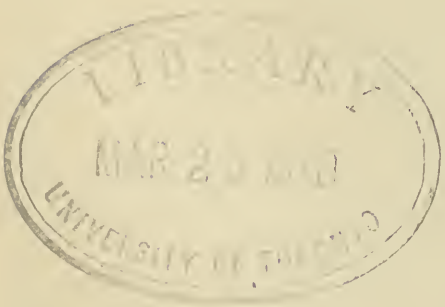
LONDON:
PRINTED BY OGDEN, SMALE AND CO. LIMITED,
GREAT SAFFRON HILL, E.C.



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# CONTENTS.


PAGE

THE FATE OF THE HARA DIAMOND. Illustrated by M. L. Gow.

Chap.
XXVI. Lost as Soon as Found . . . . . 1
XXVII. The Confession . . . . . 7
XXVIII. The Confession Continued . . . . . 13
XXIX. Madgin Junior's Second Report . . . . . 20
XXX. Room Number Four in the Corridor . . . . 89
XXXI. At the Curtained Door . . . . . 95
XXXII. The Little Packet from London . . . . 99
XXXIII. Madgin Junior's Third Report . . . . . 107
XXXIV. The Third Report Continued . . . . . 177
XXXV. George Strickland's Quest . . . . . 184
XXXVI. At the "Royal George" . . . . . 193
XXXVII. A Little Dinner for Three . . . . . 265
XXXVIII. Cleon Redivivus. . . . . 271
XXXIX. Pastille-Burning. . . . . 274
XL. Chasing "La Belle Rose" . . . . . 353
XLI. The Cave of St. Lazare . . . . . 360
XLII. The Verdict of Mr. Vermuser . . . . . 363
XLIII. Haunted . . . . . 369
XLIV. The Arrival of the Diamond at Deepley Walls . . 441
XLV. De Mortuis Nil Nisi Bonum . . . . . 446
XLVI. The Departure of Sir John Chillington . . . 450
XLVII. Penmawr . . . . . 454
XLVIII. All's Well that Ends Well . . . . . 461

THE BRETONS AT HOME. By CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S. With Illustrations . . . . . 48, 126, 223, 309, 387, 507

Adventures of a Guinea Pig, The. By C. J. LANGSTON . . . 566
Apparition. By C. E. MEETKERKE . . . . . 88
Cavalleria Rusticana . . . . . 553
Children's Dreams. By PAULINE W. ROOSE . . . . . 201
Countess Clara . . . . . 29
Foregone. By E. NESBIT . . . . . 308
Hänchen's Wooing. By G. B. STUART . . . . . 341
Harvest Picture, A . . . . . 250
Helen's Lover . . . . . 152
His First Attempt. By JESSIE LEETE . . . . . 251
Ideal, The . . . . . 554
Lady Hester Stanhope. By ALICE KING . . . . . 283
Life's Closing Year . . . . . 564
Life's Seasons. By SYDNEY GREY . . . . . 352
Lost in the Bush. By M. GAUNT . . . . . 78
Miss Edith's Conquest. By INA GARVEY . . . . . 330
Modern Incident, A. By GILBERT H. PAGE . . . . . 381
My Album. By ALEXANDER LAMONT . . . . . 242
Mystery at Lyndon Chase, The . . . . . 537
No Unwelcome Guest . . . . . 536
Our Great Grandmother's Wedding Dress. By ADA M. TROTTER 555
Points of View. By E. NESBIT . . . . . 176

PAGE
Poor Sir John. By the Author of "Mrs. Jerningham's Journal." 205
Psychological Experience, A. By F. M. F. Skeene . . . 290
Recalling Past Happiness. By A. H. Japp, LL.D. . . . . 27
Risky Revenge, A. By A. Beresford . . . . . 67
Silent Grave, A. By Bettina Wirth . . . . . 144
Sonnet. By Anna H. Drury . . . . . 329
Such Stuff as Dreams are Made of . . . . . 435
Tale of Carrara, A. By A. Beresford . . . . . 408
Things Unseen. By Sydney Grey. . . . . 113
Three Ages, The. By George Cotterell . . . . . 264
Tom's Luck. By C. N. Carvalho . . . . . 243
Too Soon and Too Late. By Charles Hervey . . . . 168
Trio, A. By George Cotterell . . . . . 552
Troubadours, The. By J. F. Rowbotham . . . . . 377
Two Phases in the Life of an Only Child. By Mrs. Henry Wood. Author of "East Lynne" . . . . . 477
Under the Pines. By Ada M. Trotter . . . . . 28
Yellow Rose, A. By E. Chilton . . . . . 114

*POETRY.*

Under the Pines. By Ada M. Trotter . . . . . 28
Apparition. By C. E. Meetkerke . . . . . 88
Things Unseen. By Sydney Grey . . . . . 113
Points of View. By E. Nesbit . . . . . 176
My Album. By Alexander Lamont . . . . . 242
A Harvest Picture . . . . . 250
The Three Ages. By George Cotterell . . . . . 264
Foregone. By E. Nesbit . . . . . 308
Sonnet. By Anna H. Drury . . . . . 329
The Smile. By Gilbert H. Page . . . . . 348
Life's Seasons. By Sydney Grey . . . . . 352
No Unwelcome Guest . . . . . 536
A Trio. By George Cotterell . . . . . 552
The Ideal . . . . . 554
Life's Closing Year. By Emma Rhodes . . . . . 564

*ILLUSTRATIONS.*

By M. L. Gow.

"Play the 'Jubilate' for me," she whispered, "and open wide the casement."

He staggered forward with a groan, and lifted the cold hand that would never grasp his again.

"Lost!" cried Mirpah in high glee, when the sixth guess was proclaimed.

Suddenly, through the mist of perfume that filled the room, he saw, or seemed to see, a black and threatening figure rise from the floor close by his bedside.

Haunted.

"Do you travel alone?"

Illustrations to "The Bretons at Home."

THE ARGOSY.

*JULY, 1891.*

# THE FATE OF THE HARA DIAMOND.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### LOST AS SOON AS FOUND.

JANET'S life at this time was a very quiet one; but the long years she had spent in France had been so tame and colourless, so wanting in home pleasures and endearments, that, by contrast, her days at Deepley Walls were full of variety and of that sweet charm which springs from a knowledge that you are at once appreciated and loved.

Janet's love for Captain George was as yet a timid, callow fledgeling that could do nothing but flutter in the nest where it was born. Very pretty to look at, but not to be looked at too often, for fear lest its hiding-place should be found out and some rude hand should take it unawares. Her love for Sister Agnes was of a different texture, and made up the real quiet happiness of her life. She felt like a plant that has been lifted out of the cold corner in which it has found the elements of a stunted growth and set to bask in a flood of gracious sunshine. In such cases the result is not difficult to foretell. The plant grows more and more beautiful under the sweet influence that has been brought to bear upon it, and repays the sunshine with its most fragrant blossoms. In such-like was Janet's young life nourished and enriched by the love that existed between her and Sister Agnes. Her inner life developed itself unconsciously; her heart grew in wisdom, and all the finer qualities of her nature began to unfold themselves one by one as delicate leaves unfold themselves in the sun.

Janet was kept very closely to her duties by Lady Chillington. Still, each day brought its little interregnums—odd hours, or even half-hours, when she was not wanted by her task-mistress—when her ladyship was sleeping, or lunching, or discussing private matters with Mr. Madgin, or what not. By far the greater part of these stolen moments were spent with Sister Agnes. More would have been so

spent had not the invalid given strict injunctions that a certain portion of each day should be set apart by Janet for out-door exercise. Sister Agnes was far too weak to accompany her. As the summer days went on she gathered not strength but weakness, and more and more clearly she began to discern the end that was coming so surely upon her. But as yet this was a solemn secret known only to herself and to her doctor. By no one else within Deepley Walls was it even suspected. Outwardly there was no change in her from day to day, or one so slight that those who were in the habit of seeing her every few hours never perceived it.

Her window had a pleasant outlook across the park. Her couch was wheeled close up to it, and there she lay from early in the forenoon till late in the afternoon, a pale, spiritual-eyed lady, slowly dying, although neither by word nor look was there any betrayal of that fact to those about her. Janet, we may be sure, had no suspicion of it. Never a morning came but her first inquiry was as to whether Sister Agnes felt any better.

"A little better this morning, I think, dear," Sister Agnes would smilingly say. "Or if not stronger, at least no weaker than I was yesterday." And for the time being she would feel that her statement was true. Later on in the day some small portion of vitality would seem to fade out of her which the freshness and strength of the following morning could not wholly replace. But Janet hoped with the hopefulness of youth that when the hot, languorous days of summer should give place to the chastened heats of autumn, health and strength would come back to Sister Agnes; hoped it devoutly, although she knew that should such be the case, she herself would no longer be needed by Lady Chillington, but that she should have to go out into the world and fight for her daily bread with such small skill as there might be in her. Meanwhile she waited on Sister Agnes, and ministered to her simple needs as much as lay in her power to do so. To gather a fresh bouquet every morning for the room of her she loved so dearly was one of Janet's pleasantest occupations. Then there was always some new and interesting book to read aloud, with frequent interludes of music and conversation. Now and then an odd hour or two would be devoted to the science of the needle. Happy days! days such as Janet, if she were to live to be a hundred years old, could never forget.

Now that she had become more accustomed to Lady Chillington and her peculiar ways, the duties of her position ceased to press so heavily upon Janet. She found, to her surprise, that Lady Chillington's often positively cruel speeches no longer wounded her feelings so deeply as they did at first. The dislike and fear with which she had formerly regarded the strange old woman began to give place to a gentler feeling—to one of profound pity, and in this very pity she found an armour of proof against all the slights and contumely with which she was treated. One thing must be said in

favour of Lady Chillington. However capricious she might be in her own treatment of Janet, the servants were given to understand that in all things Miss Hope was to be regarded as a young gentlewoman, and not as one of themselves. Sometimes her ladyship would be overcome by a fit of graciousness, which, however, never lasted more than a day or two at a time; but while it did last Janet felt that her life was a very pleasant one. Such occasions were exceptional. Lady Chillington's normal mood was one of mingled harshness and suspicion, just rubbed over with a sort of cynical *laissez faire* that to a girl of Janet's disposition was peculiarly distasteful. Janet never answered her taunts and bitter speeches, but now and then a flash of scorn from her beautiful eyes, or a sudden rush of colour to her cheek, showed that the barbed words had struck home. Janet's icy meekness had often the effect of irritating her ladyship far more than any angry retort would have done. At the latter she would merely have laughed, but Janet's demeanour seemed suggestive of a fine though hidden contempt, and betrayed an indifference to her taunts that robbed her of half her pleasure in the utterance of them. As a consequence, there being no real faults to lay hold of, she sometimes accused Janet of those faults from which she was most free.

"Who and what are you, Miss Hope," she one day asked, in her scornful way, "that you should give yourself the airs of a grande dame when in my presence? Judging from your demeanour, you and not I might be the mistress of Deepley Walls. Pride ill becomes a dependent like you—a mere nobody—a person who has eaten the bread of charity from the day of her birth. If you had even the excuse of good looks! But that is quite out of the question. If you are in any way remarkable, it is for an incurable gaucherie, and for a stolidity of intellect that would not discredit a ploughboy."

It was only the teaching and example of Sister Agnes that kept Janet on such occasions from breaking into open rebellion, and bidding farewell for ever to Deepley Walls. But the gentle counsels of the sick woman prevailed, and by degrees these bitter speeches lost much of their sting.

Sometimes, when her mood was more than ordinarily spiteful, her ladyship would touch Janet's feelings in a different way It was part of Janet's duties to assist Lady Chillington with the use of her arm as the latter walked from room to room, or on the terrace outside. As the two were walking staidly along, the old lady would sometimes pinch Janet's arm viciously between her thumb and finger. The first time this happened, Janet started and gave utterance to a little shriek.

"What is the matter, child?" said her ladyship, stopping suddenly in her walk. "Have you seen a mouse, or what has frightened you? Pray try to keep your nerves under better control."

After that first time, Janet bore the infliction in stoical silence, but

her arm was seldom without two or three blue and black finger marks as evidences of the petty torture she had undergone. To Sister Agnes she made no mention of this fresh mode of annoyance. The knowledge of it would only have jarred the sick woman's feelings still more, and would not have spared Janet the infliction.

Once every forenoon, between the hours of ten and twelve, Lady Chillington marched in her slow and stately fashion, and leaning on Janet's arm, from her own rooms on one side of the house to those of Sister Agnes on the opposite side, there to make formal inquiry as to the state of the latter's health. She never stayed longer than three or four minutes at each visit, and she never sat down. She seemed to regard these daily visits as a matter of duty, and as such she conscientiously included them in each day's programme of things to be done; but she spent no more time over them than was absolutely necessary. Sometimes Janet, on returning alone to the sick woman's room, soon after one of these visits, would find Sister Agnes in tears. Those were the only occasions on which her habitual serenity seemed to be seriously disturbed. But at sight of Janet's loving face her tears soon ceased to flow.

About this time Father Spiridion began to be seen more frequently at Deepley Walls. His visits were to Sister Agnes. Janet had contracted quite a liking for the kindly old man. He was a strange mixture of shrewdness and benignity, of prejudice and out-of-the-way knowledge. He never met Janet without a smile and a few words of pleasant greeting. She was too old now to have sweetmeats given her, so he gave her his blessing instead. Now, as of old, one of her greatest treats was to hear him play the grand old organ in the gallery.

Slowly and almost imperceptibly Sister Agnes faded from day to day, and those most about her suspected nothing. But at daybreak one morning there was a ringing of bells, and Dr. Graile was sent for in hot haste, and by-and-by it was reported through the house that Sister Agnes had become suddenly worse, and that her life was in danger. Janet was like one distracted. She was forbidden the room, and three whole days and nights passed away before she saw again the face of her she so dearly loved. She besieged the doctor and the nurse with questions, but from neither of those functionaries could anything beyond a grave shake of the head be elicited. How she got through her routine of duties with Lady Chillington she could never afterwards remember. Happily during those few days her ladyship was less exacting than common—more silent and subdued, and given to long fits of absorbing self-communion.

On the fourth morning a message came to Janet that she was wanted in Sister Agnes's room. She went tremblingly. As she put her hand on the door it was opened from the inside, and Lady Chillington came out. Janet had never seen such an expression on her face before. It was set and colourless, and full of a deep, frowning

trouble. The trouble sprang from her heart; the frown was a visible sign of her intense will—of her unsparing determination to trample that trouble under foot and put it away from her for ever. Her eyes were fixed straight before her, but seemed to see nothing. Her tall, thin figure looked as upright and rigid as if cast in bronze. She swept slowly past Janet without appearing to have seen her.

Janet passed forward into the little sitting-room. She saw with an aching heart that this morning the sofa was without its occupant. After a word of warning from the nurse, she was allowed to enter the bedroom; then the door was closed behind her, and she and Sister Agnes were left alone.

Janet could not repress the low cry that sprang to her lips at the first glimpse of the changed face before her. On it there now rested the unmistakable seal of death. Janet flung herself on her knees by the side of the bed in an agony of grief, and pressed to her lips the worn white hand that was extended to greet her.

"My poor darling — my poor Janet!" was all that Sister Agnes could murmur. There were no tears in her eyes, but on her lips a smile of heavenly contentment.

Mindful of the caution that had been given her, Janet, after a few minutes, contrived to subdue in some measure the outward signs of the grief that was rending her heart.

"Come nearer," whispered Sister Agnes; "let me clasp you in my arms; let me feel for a little while that you are all my own. I have something to tell you, and not much time to tell it in. Kiss me, darling, and then listen to what I have to say without interrupting me."

When Janet had nestled to the side of the sick woman, and they had kissed each other fondly, Sister Agnes spoke again. Her words were low but clear; every syllable fell distinctly on her listener's ears. Occasionally she had to pause for breath, but Janet never spoke a word until she had done.

"It is a strange confession, dear Janet, that I am about to make," she began. "What I have now to tell you I bound myself by a solemn oath many years ago never to reveal until my dying day. That day has come at last. A few short hours will now end all. I have taken counsel with Father Spiridion, from whom I have no secrets. He has given me leave to speak. To-day is my last day on earth, and my oath is no longer binding. I could not have died happy had I carried my secret with me to the grave. But before I go any further, you must give me your sacred word never to reveal to Lady Chillington, nor indeed to anyone else, what I am about to tell you, without having first obtained the sanction of Father Spiridion and Major Strickland to your taking such a step. Later on you will understand fully my reasons for asking for such a promise."

Sister Agnes paused as if waiting for a reply. But Janet could not speak. A long, lingering pressure of the arms was her only answer. But it was an answer that satisfied the dying woman. She pressed

her lips fondly to the tear-stained face that was nestling on her shoulder, and then went on with her narration.

"Dearest, the time has now come for me to lift from off your life the weight of that mystery which has lain upon it ever since you were little more than a lisping child—since you first began to feel, think and understand, and to wonder why you were unlike other children in having no mother nor home of your own. The secret of your birth shall be to you a secret no longer. All these years, darling, you have not been without a mother's love, though you yourself might know it not. Janet, my darling! my daughter! it is your mother whose arms are round you now. Hush, sweet one! do not speak. My little strength will hardly serve to carry me to the end. Yes, dear one, I am your mother, and Lady Chillington is your grandmother; I am her ladyship's youngest and only living child. Why all these things have been kept from you for so long a time, why you have lived unacknowledged under the roof that should have held you as its greatest treasure, will be duly revealed to you after my death. Attached to this silver chain is a tiny key that will open a box which will be given to you by Father Spiridion. Inside that box you will find a paper written by me, which will tell you everything relating to your birth and history that it is needful for you to know. The good father and Major Strickland will be your counsellors; put yourself and your cause implicitly into their hands, and leave the rest to a Higher Power. Sweet one, I have now told you all that it is needful for you to know while I am still with you—all that my strength will allow me to say. We can be together but a brief while longer; let us during that time forget everything save that we are mother and child."

"Oh, mother, mother!" sobbed Janet, "are we brought together after all these years only to part again in so short a time?"

"Even so, dearest. And why should we grieve that such is the case? Our parting is only for a time. No conviction was ever more deeply impressed upon me than that is. As I stand now, earthly troubles and sorrows have no power to touch me. Even the knowledge that I am about to separate from my Janet cannot quench the solemn joy that fills my soul. I am so close to eternity that a few years seem to me but as one day. And when that brief, troubled day shall be at an end, I pray that my daughter and I may meet again in that heavenly rest into which all those shall enter who have guided their footsteps aright."

But Janet could not be consoled.

Later on in the day Sister Agnes sent for her again, and mother and daughter spent more than an hour together in sacred communion. In the dusk of evening Lady Chillington went again to her sick daughter's room. What passed at that last interview was known to themselves alone. Lady Chillington never again saw her daughter alive. Then Father Spiridion administered the last offices of his

Church to the dying woman. About nine o'clock the doctor drove up in his gig. But the time when he could be of service was gone by. At last mother and daughter were left alone together, and alone they remained all through the dark hours. At daybreak, Father Spiridion glided into the room. The fast-sinking woman opened her eyes and smiled.

"Play the 'Jubilate' for me," she whispered, "and open wide the casement."

The deep voice of the organ, exultant, yearning, solemn, thrilled through the room; and on its wings, through the faint grey of the autumn morning, the soul of Sister Agnes was borne away.

"Forget not that we shall meet again," were her last words.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE CONFESSION.

Miss Hope, Father Spiridion and Major Strickland were seated together in the little parlour of the latter on a certain morning a few weeks after the death of Sister Agnes. The Major had been over to Deepley Walls to beg a holiday for Janet, and had brought her back with him. This was the day appointed for the opening of the box that had been left in the Father's charge.

Janet in her black dress looked pale and worn, but very lovely. She had been obliged in some measure to conceal the outward tokens of her grief for fear of exciting the suspicions of Lady Chillington, and the effort had lent a touch of sternness to her face such as it had never worn before. The wound in her heart was as deep as it had ever been, but she had learned already to control her emotions, and her demeanour this morning was marked by a gravity and self-restraint that made her seem older than her years.

When they were all seated at table, Father Spiridion produced the box, a very small affair, made of cedar and hooped with silver. Janet handed him the key and he proceeded to open it.

"Before making an examination of the contents," he said, turning to Janet, "it is requisite that I should enlighten you on one or two points. At the request of Sister Agnes, I have informed our friend, Major Strickland, of the relationship that existed between you and her; I have told him also that you are the grand-daughter of Lady Chillington—two facts with which he was previously unacquainted, and which are a source of great surprise to him. I have further informed him as to the particular request of Sister Agnes that he should act with me in this case as trustee or executor for the furtherance of your interests in whatsoever direction those interests may seem to lie. Of the contents of this box I have only a general knowledge. I believe the chief article in it will be found to be a statement, written out by Sister Agnes, in which will be given such

details of her early life as she has deemed needful for the complete elucidation of the facts that she was desirous of submitting for our consideration. Of those details I myself have no knowledge; but with her relations towards you and Lady Chillington I was made acquainted several years ago under the seal of confession. With your permission, we will now proceed to an examination of the contents of the box."

Father Spiridion opened the box slowly and reverently, as though he could not forget that it had been last closed by the fingers of the dead. Of the contending emotions by which Janet was agitated it would be vain to attempt any analysis. She sat with one hand clasped rigidly in the other, her large luminous eyes fixed steadfastly on Father Spiridion, her bosom rising and falling rather faster than common, but looking in other respects as cold and statuesque as though she had been cut out of some beautiful stone.

The first article produced by Father Spiridion from the box was a miniature, painted on ivory, of an exceedingly handsome young man, with initials in filigree silver at the back. The next article was a large old-fashioned gold locket, containing hair of two different colours, worked into the form of a true-lover's knot. Then came a worn wedding-ring. Then a marriage certificate, the writing of which was faded and yellow with age. Next, two or three love-letters, signed with the same initials, "E. F.," as were on the back of the miniature. Last of all came several sheets of paper stitched together, and folded across and endorsed :—

"A Confession.

"To be read by my daughter, Janet Hope; by my old and faithful friend, Major Strickland; and by my father-confessor, Father Spiridion; by them, and by no one else."

Each article as it was produced from the box was, after a cursory examination, handed over to Janet. She gazed at the portrait and the locket with no other sign of outward emotion than a closer knitting of her brows. The wedding-ring she kissed passionately. The certificate she read carefully twice over, and her face flushed as she read. Then she refolded it and put it calmly down in its place on the table. The love-letters were merely glanced at, and were then left for future consideration. The Confession itself Janet took into her hands for a moment. She recognised the writing at once. With a deep sigh, she gave it back to the priest.

"Read it aloud, dear Father Spiridion, if you please," she said.

The old man rubbed his spectacles slowly and solemnly, as befitted the occasion, placed them carefully astride his nose, and after a preliminary cough, took up the paper and read what follows :—

"My darling Janet,—It is not intended that these lines shall meet your eye till the hand that writes them is mingled with the dust

from which it came. I have been driven to write what is here set down by some inward influence—by some occult power working through me, and giving me no rest till I promised myself that it should be done. For myself, I have done with the world and its active duties long ago. I have no longer any interest in it, except in so far as I may be permitted to watch over your fortunes, to love you with the secret love of a mother who dares not acknowledge her child, and to perform such small works of charity among the sick and poor as my humble means may allow of. But as regards you, the case is altogether different. You are on the verge of womanhood, and life, with all its struggles and temptations, is still before you. To lift up and clear away the mystery that has enveloped your childhood and youth, to inform you what your real position is in that great world into which you are about to enter, is therefore an act of the simplest justice, and one which ought no longer to be delayed. Unfortunately, the revelation is one which I am forbidden to make while I am alive; but I am advised that in the form of a written confession it may be received by you after my death. These remarks will be better understood by you when you shall have read the whole of what I am now about to set down.

"I was born at Deepley Walls, the youngest of three children. My brother Charles, who died in India at the age of twenty, was two years older, and my sister Eudoxia, who died when she was fourteen, was six years older than I. When I was three years old I was sent for by my father's half-sister, a rich maiden lady who lived at Beckley, in Cumberland. It was understood that I was to be regarded as her adopted child, and that some day the great bulk of her fortune would come to me. Of my father I remember next to nothing. I never saw him again after going to live at Beckley. I have been told, and I have reason to believe it true, that he disliked me, and was glad to be rid of me for ever. In this respect my sister fared worse than I did. My father disliked her almost as much as he disliked me; but poor Eudoxia had no rich aunt to release her from a tyranny that was driving her slowly into the grave.

"My father, Sir John Chillington, was a man of strong passions; cruel and unbending to a degree where he could be so with impunity. He and my mother were ill-matched. Knowing as you do, what Lady Chillington is now, how proud, stern and unyielding, with yet occasional capricious fits of kindness and generous feeling, you will readily understand how her married life was one of perpetual discord and soul-fretting unhappiness. At length she and my father separated in consequence of a disagreement respecting my brother, and they never saw each other again till my father lay dying. He carried his dislike of my mother beyond the grave, in ordering that his body should be kept unburied for twenty years; that it should remain under whatever roof my mother might choose to make her permanent residence during that time; and that my mother should visit it in

person at least once a week during the whole period of twenty years, should her life be spared for so long a time.

"In the seclusion of Beckley, the items of news that reached us from Deepley Walls were few and far between. I had never been encouraged to write to either of my parents, and neither of them ever thought of writing to me. A coldly-worded letter once every six months from my aunt to her brother, and an equally cold reply a month or two afterwards, were the sole links that bound me to those I would fain have loved but could not. At the age of seventeen I knew or remembered little more of my parents than I should have done had they died on the day I left Deepley Walls. Had they really been dead I should have cherished their memory, and thought tenderly of them; but since they were alive, their cold neglect chilled me to the heart, and withered every flower of love that ought to have flourished there.

"But I was not unhappy. Although my life at Beckley was one of almost conventual seclusion, and although my aunt was a woman of unsympathetic nature and ascetic disposition, the springs of youth were fresh within me, and who could tell what happiness the future might not have in store? The situation of the house was a very lonely one, and there being so little that was attractive to me within doors, it cannot be wondered at that nearly the whole of my spare time was spent among the glorious moors and fells by which we were shut in on every side. My aunt never made any objection to my long solitary rambles: solitude was congenial to herself; she loved best to be alone, and to her it seemed only natural and proper that my disposition in such things should bear some resemblance to her own.

"It was on the occasion of one of these lonely rambles that I first encountered Mr. Fairfax. He had been out fishing, and was crossing the moor a little way behind me on his road to the nearest village, when a sudden thunderstorm came on. In three minutes I should have been drenched to the skin. Mr. Fairfax saw the emergency, hurried up, apologised, introduced himself, and insisted on my acceptance of his waterproof till the rain should have ceased. I loved him from that first time of seeing him. We met again and again. If a man's oaths may ever be trusted, he loved me in return. I listened and believed. He asked me to elope with him, and I told him that if he would make me his wife I would follow him to the end of the world. He said: 'It will be my dearest happiness to make you my wife, only you must give me your solemn promise never to reveal your marriage without having first obtained my permission to do so. Family reasons compel me to ask this sacrifice.' To make such a promise implied no sacrifice on my part; it was not his family but himself that I was about to marry, and to my mind there was something very delicious in the thought of being a participant in so important a secret.

"But why go into details?—although I could linger over this part of my story for years. It is sufficient to say that we eloped, and that we were married the same day at Whitehaven, a few miles away. A friend of Mr. Fairfax, named Captain Lant, gave me away. The only other witness to our marriage was the old pew-opener. Immediately after the marriage we bade farewell to Captain Lant, and went northward into Scotland. After a happy month spent in the Highlands we came South. I would fain have stopped to see the wonders of London, of which I had heard so much at different times, but Mr. Fairfax would only agree to pass one night there, after which we at once set out for the Continent. Avoiding Paris and all the large towns, but lingering here and there in some sweet country nook, we came at length to the borders of the Lake of Lucerne. Half a mile inland, but overlooking the lake, and out of the ordinary track of tourists, we found a tiny villa that was in want of a tenant. Mr. Fairfax took it for a term of six months, and there we settled down.

"Before leaving Scotland my husband had allowed me to write to my father, and also to my aunt, informing them of my marriage, but mentioning neither my husband's name, nor the place where we were then living. If any answers were sent, they were to be addressed to me under my maiden name at one of the London district post-offices. When we reached town, my husband sent to the office in question. There was only one letter for me. It was from my father, and contained, as enclosures, my letters to himself and to my aunt. His reply was a cruel one. In it he told me that he had disowned me for ever. That to him and to my mother I was as though I had never lived; or rather, as though I had died on my wedding morn. That they had put on mourning for me, and looked upon me in all respects as one dead. Finally, he forbade me ever to communicate with him again, either by letter, or in any other way.

"This letter cut me to the quick. In what way it affected my husband I was unable to judge. He read it through in silence, and then tossed it contemptuously on one side; nor did he ever allude to it in any way again.

"I had been so accustomed from childhood upward to exist on such a very small modicum of love that the sting implanted by my father's letter would have made no enduring wound had the great compensation of a husband's enduring love been granted me in place of that which I had lost. It is true that I was married, and that I had a husband who loved me; but his love was not of that kind on which my heart could rest as on a rock against which all the storms of life would beat in vain. Mr. Fairfax, when he married me, meant that his love should be of the strong and enduring kind; but by what magic at our command shall we change freestone into granite, or chalk into marble? How could I blame Mr. Fairfax for the non-possession of a quality which Nature had utterly denied him?

Constancy was a virtue that he might dimly comprehend, but which he altogether failed to reduce into the practice of his daily life.

"The pretty castle I had built on my wedding-day proved to be of the veriest mushroom growth. The enchanted prince who was to have dwelt happily in it his whole life long refused to be confined within such narrow limits, and razed its golden walls to the ground with a sneer.

"However much I might repine in secret for the loss of that which could never be mine again, I made no complaint in words. I bore all in proud silence: my husband never heard a single murmur from my lips. The decay of his love was not a matter of a day or a week. It was slow, gradual, sure. I sometimes found myself morbidly trying to calculate how long a time would elapse before its last grains would vanish as the million that had gone before had vanished, leaving nothing but cold indifference behind. There was some slight touch of comfort in after days in knowing that those few last grains were still mine on that morning when I saw him for the last time.

"We had lived nearly twelve months on the banks of Lucerne. During that time my husband had made two journeys to London, on both occasions being away from me exactly fourteen days. He never said a word to me as to the nature of the business which called him away, and I was too proud to ask him. Although his wife, I knew absolutely nothing respecting his antecedents, his actual position in society, or what relatives he had and who they were. I had married him without asking to be enlightened on such matters, and he took care afterwards that my ignorance should remain undisturbed. I knew that there was some mystery in the case. He had told me as much as that when asking me to swear not to reveal the fact of our marriage to anyone without his express sanction. More than that I did not seek to know. What did it matter to me who or what this man's relations were, when the love with which he had bound me to himself was slowly breaking link by link? But what I did secretly resent was the fact that all letters addressed to him were fetched by himself personally from the nearest post-office; and all letters written by him were written furtively, as it were, so that not a line of their contents should be seen by me, and were likewise posted by himself so that no second pair of eyes should see how they were addressed.

"At length there came a day when Mr. Fairfax received a letter which seemed to trouble him more than any he had ever received before during the brief time I had been his wife. I had no means of judging by whom it was written. He read it over at least twenty times, and each time its perusal seemed to leave him more puzzled than he had been before. Then he put it away, and I did not see it again. But during the two days that followed before he answered it there was something in his manner which told me how deeply that letter was centred in his thoughts. Two or three days still later he announced to me that he was going on a sketching expedition, and

that he might be away for a couple of weeks. It was not the first time he had made a similar excuse for leaving me, but he had never before been away for so long a time. Whenever Mr. Fairfax was absent, a certain Signora Trachini, the widow of a poor Italian gentleman, came and kept me company at the villa till his return. This time also she came, with her needles and her immense balls of cotton, and her well-thumbed breviary. Then my husband, having packed up all things requisite for his expedition, bade me a more than ordinarily affectionate farewell, and left me. I watched him down the winding road that leads to the lake, a peasant trudging behind with his luggage. At the corner where the large orange tree grows, he turned and waved his hand. And that was the last that I ever saw of Edmund Fairfax."

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE CONFESSION CONTINUED.

"My husband had been about three days gone when bad weather set in. For several hours the lake was lashed by a wild storm of wind and rain. Then the rain ceased, and fitful gleams of sunshine lighted up the landscape, but the wind still blew in fierce, troubled gusts, and so continued for several days. On the sixth day after my husband's departure I was surprised by a visit from Captain Lant, whom I had not seen since my wedding-day. He was very grave, but there was nothing in his looks from which I could augur that he was the bearer of ill news. He was not a man whom I could ever have liked, but I bade him welcome for my husband's sake. His first words told me that I had lost that husband for ever. Mr. Fairfax had been drowned during the storm three days before, while out sketching in a small boat on the Lake of Zurich. His body had been recovered; had been recognised by Captain Lant, in whose company my husband was making the excursion, but who had not been on the lake; and had been buried the following morning in the churchyard nearest the scene of the accident. In corroboration of his story, Captain Lant brought me my husband's vest, his purse, his ring, his watch, his pencil-case, and a small pocket-book, the whole of which articles had the appearance of having been in the water for several hours. I could not doubt the truth of his tale.

"Captain Lant stayed with me, and did all that could be done to facilitate my arrangements for leaving the villa and returning to England. Among the luggage which my husband had not taken with him was found a pocket-book containing bank-notes to the value of two hundred pounds. The notes were sealed up in an envelope that was endorsed with my name, and had these words written below: 'In case of any accident happening to myself.' This proof of my husband's affectionate forethought touched me to the

quick. He might have had a presentiment of the terrible ending that was so soon to befall him.

"Before Captain Lant and I parted we had a long conversation together. I told him that I knew nothing whatever of my late husband's social position, nor whether he had a single relative in the world. On these two points I was desirous that Captain Lant should afford me some information, but he professed to be as ignorant in the matter as I was. Although Mr. Fairfax and he had been very good friends, their friendship was only a thing of three years' growth, and of my husband's antecedents he could say nothing with certainty. He himself believed him to have been the son of a small farmer in the South of England, and that his money had come to him from a rich uncle. Further than that he professed to know nothing, and with this scanty information I was obliged to rest satisfied. Captain Lant and I parted at the diligence office. He was going forward to Rome, while all my desire was to get back to England.

"On feeling for my notes a few minutes after landing from the steamer, I found that they had been stolen. I had omitted to take the numbers of them, and the police could do nothing to assist me. Four sovereigns and some loose silver was all the money I had in the world. After a couple of days spent at a quiet boarding-house in London, I set out for Deepley Walls. It was late in autumn, and the weather was excessively cold. There was no railway in those days, and the coach by which I had to travel was full inside. I travelled outside, and had to be lifted down at Eastbury, so benumbed was I with the intense cold. No news from home had reached me during the time of my sojourn on the Continent, and now, at the Eastbury hotel, I heard for the first time that my father was dead. I heard it to all outward seeming as a stranger might have heard it; none there knew who I was.

"I parted with my last half-crown at the hotel, and then I set out to walk the three miles to Deepley Walls. You must bear in mind that I had not been at the hall since I was four years old, and that, consequently, the way was entirely strange to me. I did not leave the little town till dusk, and the snow was falling fast by the time I got fairly out into the country lanes. I inquired at one or two cottages by the way, but I must have wandered far out of the direct road, for when I at length reached Deepley Walls, wet through and half dead with cold and fatigue, the turret clock was just striking twelve. The house loomed vast and dark before me, with nowhere a single ray of light to bid me welcome. My heart grew faint within me. I lay down under the portico and prayed that I might die. How long I had lain thus I cannot tell, when I was roused to partial consciousness by hearing a sound as if some metallic substance had fallen on to the flagged floor of the hall inside. Then I heard faint sounds as if someone were moving

about in the darkness, and presently a dim thread of light shone from under the door. As I afterwards learned, my mother had been to pay her customary visit to the Black Room upstairs, and in returning across the hall had dropped her lamp to the ground. On seeing the thread of light I staggered to my feet, and beat with both my hands against the door. Then a voice cried out, 'Who are you? and what do you want?'

"'My name is Helen Fairfax,' I replied, 'and I want to see Lady Chillington.'

"There was a dead silence for full two minutes, then I heard the rustle of a silk dress, and presently the great bolts were drawn one by one, and then the door of my lost home was flung wide open, but not for me to enter. On the threshold stood a tall figure, dark and threatening, dark except for the white hands, gemmed with rings, one of which held on high a small antique lamp, and the white face full of wrath and menace.

"'I am Lady Chillington,' said this phantom, in a cold, passionless voice. 'Once more I ask, Who are you?'

"'Your daughter, madam. Helena, your unhappy child.'

"'My daughter Helena died and was buried long ago. You may be her ghost for aught I know or care. In any case, this is no place for you; within this door you can never enter; under this roof you can never come. Go! I have no daughter. I am childless and a widow.'

"'But, madam—mother, hear me! I am your daughter—I——'

"'I tell you that I have no daughter,' she interrupted, in her cold, imperative way. 'My daughter fell into shame, and then to me she became as utterly dead as if the ocean were rolling over her bones: dead in heart and dead in memory. You are an impostor. Go!'

"'Oh! mother, listen to me. I am not an impostor. I am your own daughter Helena. No shame clings to my name. My husband is dead, and this is the only place in the wide world where I can ask for shelter or a crust of bread.'

"'Not so much as a crust of bread shall you ever have from me. You know my will. Go at once and never darken this door again. When you die, may you die uncared for and unknown! May your eyes be closed by the hands of strangers, and may the hands of strangers lay you in your grave! Go!'

"Speaking thus, Lady Chillington faded back into the darkness. Slowly and resistlessly the door was closed; slowly and deliberately the great bolts were pushed into their sockets; the silk dress rustled; the ribbon of light shone for a moment under the door; then all was darkness and silence, and I was alone.

"I crept away from the cruel door into the less cruel night. The night and the snow seemed like friends that would wrap me

round, and tend me, and hush me into a sleep that should know no waking in this bitter world. I was as one on whose soul sits some awful nightmare which makes him seem, even in his own eyes, something other than himself. I knew that the woman who had smitten me with those cruel words was my mother, but I was past wondering at that, or at anything else. All that had befallen me was only in the common course of events, and it was quite right and proper that I should be walking there alone at that hour, with my back turned to the roof that should have sheltered me, and with no spot in all the wide world on which I could claim to lay my head. In my heart there was no bitterness; only a dull, vague longing for peace and rest and a deep winding-sheet of snow. There was something within me that would allow me neither pause nor rest till I had left the park of Deepley Walls behind. I had shunned the ordinary lodge-entrance, and had gained access to the grounds through a stile in a bye-lane, connected with which is a right of footpath across one corner of the estate. I went back by the same road, and at length recognised in a bewildered sort of way that I was out of the park and had all the world before me where to choose. A light snow was still falling, but the wind had died down, and with it had gone that intensity of cold from which I had suffered before. I dragged myself slowly onward, but more by a sort of instinct than by any exertion of will. But beyond this point I have no clear recollection of anything. I only know that when I woke up I found myself in the Home of the Sisterhood of Good Works, to which place I had been conveyed by a charitable carrier who had found me lying insensible in the snow.

"There I lay very ill for a long time. During one part of my illness my mind wandered, and from certain words I let drop at that time, the Sisterhood were induced to write to Lady Chillington. She—my mother—came. She saw me when I was unconscious of her presence, and she saw me afterwards when I was slowly coming back to life and health. Then was the unwritten compact entered into by which it was agreed that when sufficiently recovered I should go and live at Deepley Walls, not as the daughter of its mistress, but, under the assumed name of Sister Agnes, as Lady Chillington's paid companion and very humble friend.

"In the meantime you, my darling Janet, had been born. I nursed you myself till you were six months old. Then Lady Chillington insisted on your being put out, and on my going to live at Deepley Walls. But previously to doing this her ladyship extorted from me a double promise. First, never by word, look or deed to reveal to anyone the fact of the relationship between herself and me. Secondly, never till my dying day to reveal either to you or to anyone else the fact that you and I were mother and daughter. This double promise was not made by me without first consulting those whose opinions I was bound to revere. At that time I looked upon

the promise as a penalty in part for the errors of my life. Since that time I have often felt inclined to doubt the wisdom of having made it. The penalty has been a far heavier one than I thought it would be. To see you, my daughter, the one sweet flower that has blossomed out of my withered life, to see you and know you as my own, and yet not to dare to claim you as such, surely that was too great a penance for one weak mortal to bear!

"My narrative is nearly at a close. By the time you have read thus far you will understand why you were brought up at Miss Chinfeather's academy, and why you were sent from that place to Deepley Walls. Lady Chillington's strange treatment will also in part be understood by you. You were a disturbing element in that fossilised life to which she had become accustomed. Still, if I have read her character aright, you, her grand-daughter, are far more precious in her sight than I, her daughter, ever was. I am very very happy to think that such is the case; and I have sometimes ventured to hope that after I shall be gone, you and she may be drawn still more closely together. That the withered ashes of her affections may yet derive some vital heat from the generous impulses of your heart. That her pride may give way sufficiently to induce her to place you in your proper position in the world, and to allow your hands, as being those of the one nearest and dearest to her, to tend her lovingly on that downward path which she and I are alike treading; and of which the end can be no great distance away.

"I have necessarily left one of the most important points of my narrative till the last.

"When Captain Lant told me that he knew nothing positive as to the antecedents of your father, but that he believed him to have been the son of a small farmer in the south of England, and that his money had been left him by a rich uncle, I believed him implicitly. But during the long solitary years by which my life has been marked since that time, I have gone back in thought a thousand times to those few brief wedded months, and have brooded over all the circumstances by which they were surrounded. One result of this perpetual brooding has been that I have learned in my own mind to distrust the statement made by Captain Lant. I cannot believe that Mr. Fairfax was the son of a small farmer. He was a gentleman, and had about him all the signs of one who had been brought up amongst gentlefolk. From hints and odd words dropped by him at different times and afterwards recalled by me in memory, I gathered that he had travelled extensively, that he had been at college, that he was a member of one or two West-end clubs, that he had at one time kept his own hunters, and that he was personally known to several people of rank. In all this there was nothing that betrayed the farmer's son.

"From this conviction—not arrived at in a day or a month—of Captain Lant's untruthfulness, a suspicion has gradually forced itself

upon me—and at the present moment it is nothing more than a suspicion—that the entire story of Mr. Fairfax's sudden death was neither more nor less than a clever fabrication to get rid of a woman for whom he no longer cared. It may seem cruel to you, my dear Janet, even to hint at such a thing in connection with a man whose memory you ought to revere, especially as I have not the slightest atom of positive proof on which to base such a suspicion. But now, if ever, the whole truth must be told you. About all Captain Lant's statements there was an air of unreality which did not strike me so forcibly at the time as it did afterwards, when I went back in recollection over the events of that terrible time. Sometimes the suspicion that I was nothing more than the victim of a clever lie would deepen in my mind till it almost assumed the proportions of a certainty. At other times it would wither and lose all its vivid colouring, and seem nothing more than the dream of a distempered brain. It might have been nothing more than such a dream for any action I have taken in it to prove either its truth or its falsity. My love for Mr. Fairfax died out long ago, and nothing could revivify the cold ashes. If he were not really dead, but merely wished to cast me off, he had attained his end, and so enough. Had it been possible to lure him back to my side, the wish to do so had long passed away. I coveted neither riches nor position: my life had aims that were directed otherwhere.

"But with you, my daughter, the case is entirely different. You hold your position at Deepley Walls by a precarious tenure. Lady Chillington is a woman of capricious temper and inflexible will. She might choose to turn you adrift to-morrow: to cast you on the world, helpless and alone. On the other hand, she may have made adequate provision for you in the case of anything happening to herself. But this is a matter respecting which I am entirely ignorant, and were I to speak to her respecting it I should only be scouted for my pains. It is true that you are nearer to her in blood than anyone now living (I am writing of myself as though I were already dead), but a woman of Lady Chillington's peculiar disposition is just as likely as not to repudiate any claim which might have its origin in that fact; and it must be borne in mind that the absolute disposal of Deepley Walls, and any other property she may be possessed of, is vested entirely in her own hands.

"Under these perplexing circumstances, and with a future on which your foothold is so insecure, it has sometimes seemed to me that the wisest plan with regard to your interests would be to endeavour to unravel the mystery by which the antecedents and social position of your father are surrounded. Behind the cloud with which Mr. Fairfax chose to enshroud his life previously to our marriage, friends, relatives, fortune, happiness, may all await you, his child. So at least my dreams have run at times; and dreams at times come true.

"The terms of my oath to Lady Chillington forbade me from making any such inquiry on my own account, but in this matter you are entirely unfettered. If, therefore, your friends and counsellors, Major Strickland and Father Spiridion, think it desirable that such an investigation should be made in your interests, place the matter unreservedly in their hands, and leave them to deal with it in whatever way they may think best. That its issue may prove to be for your welfare and happiness is your dying mother's fervent prayer.

"Further, should my vague suspicion that Mr. Fairfax did not meet his death at the time and under the circumstances as told me by Captain Lant prove to have some foundation in fact, and should the story turn out to have been merely an invention to get rid of a wife who had become burdensome to him, in such a case your father is probably still among the living. Should such prove to be the fact, it is by no means unlikely that the daughter of his discarded wife might be cherished and welcomed by him as even the child of a happier marriage might not be. Should the future give you a father—one who will welcome you with open hand and open heart—go to him and be to him as a daughter. Forget your mother's wrongs: on this point I solemnly charge you: let the dead past bury its dead. Be dutiful and loving as a daughter ought to be, and leave it for a Higher Power to set straight that which is crooked, and to weigh the human heart aright.

"You have been known all these years as Janet Hope, but your real name, the one by which you were baptised, is Janet Fairfax. When you were sent away to Miss Chinfeather's seminary, it was necessary that your name should be enrolled in the books of that establishment. My mother would not allow you to go either by the name of Miss Fairfax or Miss Chillington. My own name being Helena Hope Chillington, my mother chose that you should be designated and known as Janet Hope, and in this, as in every other matter, her wishes were acceded to.

"I need hardly tell you that the miniature contained in the box in which I shall deposit this paper is that of your father, nor that the wedding-ring, which you will find near it, is the one he placed on my finger the day he took me for his wife. The relics brought me by Captain Lant as proofs of your father's death I was unfortunate enough to lose during my journey back to England.

"And now, dear Janet, my story is told."

[The few remaining pages of Sister Agnes's confession are omitted as having no bearing on the history of the Great Hara Diamond. They consisted of tender confidences and loving advice, and as such are sacred to the eyes of her for whom they were written.]

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### MADGIN JUNIOR'S SECOND REPORT.

"My dear Dad,—Your letter in reply to my first report reached my hands a week ago. It had been lying three days at the post-office before I had an opportunity of fetching it. I am glad to find that you approve of my proceedings, and think, all things considered, that I have not made bad use of my time. That you are sanguine as to the ultimate result of my mission here shows a buoyancy of disposition on your part that would not discredit any dashing young blade of twenty. I hope that your opinion will be still further confirmed when you shall have read that which I have now to put down.

"I may just remind you that I have now been at Bon Repos a month all but two days, and but for a fortunate accident the object for which I was sent here would still be as far from its accomplishment as on the day of my arrival. Even now it will rest with you to decide whether what I have to communicate is of any real value, or advances even by a single step the great end we have in view. Privately, I may tell you that I think the same great end all fudge. My faith is very lukewarm indeed as to the existence of the diamond. But even granting its existence, the present possessor, whoever he may be, were he aware of our petty machinations, would laugh them utterly to scorn.

"Your reply to this would probably be that since the unknown possessor of the diamond is not cognisant of our machinations, we have an incalculable advantage on our side. To which I venture to observe that we are tilting at shadows—that both the diamond and its owner are myths, and have no foundation in fact. And now that I have made my protest, and so eased my mind, I will proceed with my narration of what has happened at Bon Repos since the date of my last report.

"The fortunate accident of which I made mention a few lines above is neither more nor less than the serious illness of Cleon. As a consequence of this event I have been brought into closer relations with M. Platzoff. Before entering into particulars, I may just add that the stranger, Captain Ducie, is still here; but his visit, so Cleon informs me, is now drawing to a close. As I informed you before, Cleon, for some reason best known to himself, has contracted an intense dislike for the Captain, and before I had been a week at Bon Repos he had set me to act as a spy on his actions. I have watched him as far as it has been possible to do so with safety. What little I have discovered is not worth setting down here; in fact, I may say that I have discovered nothing more singular in the Captain's mode of life than would appear upon the surface of any ordinary life that was closely watched by someone who lacked the key to the

motives with which its purposes were animated. I have, then, made no actual discovery of facts as regards Captain Ducie. But for all that, a dim suspicion has grown up in my mind, having birth I cannot tell how or when, that the Captain is not without certain private designs of his own on M. Platzoff, although of what those designs may consist I have not the remotest idea. Gentlemanly man as the Captain is, there is about him a certain faint soupçon of the adventurer, and my first suspicion of some design on Platzoff may have had its rise in that fact. At all events, I have no better based facts to go upon—nothing that I can set down in black and white. For my own sake more than for Cleon's, I have determined to still retain my watch on the Captain. Time only can tell whether or no my doing so will in any way advance our interests.

"Cleon had been ailing for some days, but kept going about his duties as usual. One morning, however, he sent for me, and told me that he was too ill to rise, and that such portion of his duties for the day as could not be postponed must be gone through by me in his stead. Such duties would chiefly be those arising from personal attendance on M. Platzoff. I could see that he was terribly put about.

"'My master is such a particular man,' he said. 'I have never missed waiting on him a single day these twenty years. How he will like a stranger to go through the little indispensable offices of the toilet for him is more than I dare think of. However, in the present case there is no help for it, and you may take it as a proof of the confidence I have in you that I have selected you, a comparative stranger, to act as my deputy for the time being.'

"He then gave me a silver pass-key, which he told me would open the whole suite of private rooms occupied by M. Platzoff. He then impressed certain instructions on my mind, a minute observance of which, he said, would go some way towards reconciling M. Platzoff to the temporary loss of his, Cleon's, services. 'The private apartments,' he finished up by saying, 'consist of four rooms en suite. The first of them is the smoking-room; the second the dressing and bath-room; the third the bed-room; lastly comes a small private library or sanctum, the walls lined with books, which there will be no need for you to enter. Take the pass-key and open the doors of the smoking and dressing-rooms. When you reach the bed-room give three separate taps at the door with the handle of the key. M. Platzoff will then bid you enter. But before going in you must speak to him, and tell him that I am ill, and that I have deputed you, with his permission, to act in my stead. Even then do not go in till he bids you enter. Were you to enter unannounced you might come to grief. M. Platzoff always keeps a loaded revolver close by his pillow. In the sudden excitement of seeing a strange face near him, he might unfortunately make use of it. If he bid you not to enter, come back to me, and I will consider what further must be done. On second

thoughts, I will write a line of explanation for you to take with you. It may serve to allay any doubts M. Platzoff might feel as to the acceptance of your services.'

"I gave him pen and ink. Not without difficulty he wrote the following words, which he read to me after they were written :—

"'I am too ill this morning to rise from my bed. Unless this were really the case, you may be sure that my customary services would not be foregone. I am obliged to send you a stranger—that is, a person who is a stranger to you. You may place implicit confidence in him. I hope to be with you again to-morrow.

"'CLEON.'

"The style seemed to me a strangely familiar one in which to address his employer. But Cleon was not a man to do anything without a motive. In the present case he doubtless knew thoroughly what he was about.

"I took the pass-key, opened and went through the first and second rooms, and knocked at the door of the third. 'Enter,' said the voice of M. Platzoff from within. Then in the most respectful tone I could summon for the occasion I repeated the formula composed for me by Cleon. There was complete silence for full two minutes. Then M. Platzoff spoke. 'Come in,' he said, 'and let me see who you are.' I unlocked and opened the door, and then stood for a few moments on the threshold. The room was nearly in total darkness. The venetians were down and thick curtains drawn in front of them. A faint, sickly odour came through the doorway like that of some strongly aromatic drug. 'Come forward and open the blinds,' said a peremptory voice from the bed. I obeyed, and let in the cheerful daylight. 'I have a line from Mr. Cleon for you, sir,' I said, 'if you will kindly read it.' 'Give it me here,' he said. 'Cleon ill! The world must be coming to an end. I thought that fellow was made of cast-iron and could never get out of order.'

"I gave him the note. He opened it and read it with the assistance of his eyeglass. I seized the opportunity for a quiet glance round. If I were an upholsterer, my dear dad, which, thank goodness, I am not, I would draw you up a brief inventory of the contents of M. Platzoff's bedroom. As circumstances are, I can only say that it was by far the most elegantly-fitted sleeping-room which it had ever been my fortune to enter. In parenthesis, I may remark that in passing through the smoke-room I had been much struck with the richness and elegance of its decorations. It is fitted up in a semi-Oriental fashion, and excepting that everything in it is real and of the best quality, it looks more like a theatrical apartment fitted up for stage purposes than a real room in a country gentleman's house. Since that time I have become familiarised with the entire suite, and have picked up one or two ideas for interiors which may prove of service to my friend Davis of the Tabard.

"With an impatient 'Pish!' M. Platzoff tossed the note from him as soon as he had mastered its contents. He cut quite a comical figure as he lay there, his yellow skin looking yellower than ordinary in contrast with the white bed-furniture. His wizened face puckered into a scowl of perplexity. His blue-black chin-tuft rough and out of shape, and his cheeks and upper lip grimy for want of a razor. A conical nightcap like an extinguisher on his head, and his *robe-de-nuit* fal-lal'd with lace, as though he were some dainty bride of twenty. I could have laughed outright, but I took care to do nothing of the kind.

"'What is your name, sir? and how long have you been at Bon Repos?' he demanded, with a sort of contemptuous anger in his voice.

"'My name is James Jasmin, sir, at your service; and I have been here just one month.'

"'One month! one month!' he shrieked. 'Then what, in the fiend's name, does Cleon mean by writing that he has implicit confidence in you? Who are you? and where do you come from? How can one have implicit confidence in a man whom one has only known for four weeks? Cleon must take me for a fool.'

"'My name I have already told you, sir. Before coming here, I was in service with Mr. Madgin, of Deepley Walls.'

"M. Platzoff's face turned from yellow to green as I uttered these words. 'From Deepley Walls, did you say?' he gasped. 'From Deepley Walls in Midlandshire?'

"'That is the place, sir.' He evidently knew something about Deepley Walls, but how much or how little, was the question. I felt myself on the brink of an abyss. Was I about to be kicked out of Bon Repos as an impostor?

"'But—but I have always understood that a certain Lady Chillington was the owner of Deepley Walls?'

"'Lady Chillington is the owner, sir, but she does not live at the hall, but at a cottage in the park; the house has been let for several years back to Mr. Madgin.'

"'And how long have you been in the employ of this Mr. Madgin?'

"'Since I was quite a boy, sir.'

"'Then why have you left him?'

"'Because he is going to reside on the Continent, and is about to break up his English establishment.'

"'Then you are acquainted with Lady Chillington?'

"'Only from seeing her frequently, sir. I have never spoken to her. She is very old now, and lives a very secluded life.'

"'Has she any of her children living with her?'

"'I am not aware that her ladyship has any children. I have heard speak of one son who died in India many years ago.'

"'Ah!' Then, after a pause: 'Well, Mr. James Jasmin, I will

accept your services for the present; but I hope to goodness that Cleon is not going to be laid up for any length of time. Ring the bell for my shaving water, and reach me that dressing-gown.'

"Congratulate me, my dear dad, on the dexterity with which I extricated myself from a difficulty that in more awkward hands might readily have proved fatal.

"It is not requisite that I should enter into any details of the minor duties I had to perform for M. Platzoff. They were the ordinary duties of a body servant, and it is sufficient to say that I got through them without making any very egregious blunder. That I am still engaged in the same capacity is a tolerable proof that M. Platzoff is not dissatisfied with my services; for Cleon has not yet recovered and, although somewhat better, is still confined to his bed. Platzoff is not a difficult man to serve under. He does not treat his people like dogs, as I have heard of many so-called gentlemen doing. Only attend well to his minor comforts, and do not keep him waiting for anything, and you will never hear a wrong word from him.

"Midnight is, with certain exceptions, M. Platzoff's fixed hour for going to bed. My instructions are to go every night at twelve precisely; to give a low treble knock on the door of the smoke-room, and then with the aid of the pass-key to go in. I then relieve M. Platzoff of his pipe, generally a large Turkish hookah; accompany him to his dressing-room, and take his instructions for the morning. After that I put out the lights, and then my duties for the day are over.

"But once, sometimes twice, a week M. Platzoff is in the habit of smoking opium, or some drug so much like it that I cannot tell the difference. Whatever it may be, he smokes it till he falls into a sort of trance, in which he is unconscious of everything going on around him. My instructions are that when, on entering the smoke-room at midnight, I find him in such a trance, not to disturb him, but to watch by him till I see certain signs that the trance is abating. As soon as these signs show themselves, I lift M. Platzoff bodily up and carry him to bed, and so leave him till morning. One of Cleon's most important duties was the charging of M. Platzoff's pipe when the latter was going to have one of his opium séances; but that is too nice an operation to be entrusted to my unskilled hands, and in the absence of Cleon is, I presume, gone through by the Russian himself.

"My bed-room adjoins that of Cleon, and on two or three occasions it has happened that I have been summoned by him in the middle of the night to answer M. Platzoff's private bell, which rings in his room. On answering this bell as Cleon's deputy, I have found that M. Platzoff, not being able to sleep, has summoned me to read to him, or to assist him on with his dressing-gown, and to light his pipe for him.

"'But,' you will perhaps observe, 'what has all this rigmarole to do with the question of the Great Hara Diamond?'

"I reply that, in all probability, it has nothing whatever to do with it. But I think it requisite that you should know the details of my life at Bon Repos. Secondly, you must let me say what I have to say after my own fashion. And, thirdly, the curious incident I have now to record would hardly be comprehensible to you without the preliminary details here given.

"Last night, or rather about two o'clock this morning, came one of those untimely summonses of which I have made mention above. I was aroused by Cleon's tapping on the wall that divides our bed-rooms. I shuffled into a few clothes, anathematising M. Platzoff and the whole business as I did so, and then hurried into Cleon's room. As I expected, M. Platzoff's bell had just rung, and it was requisite that I should go and ascertain what was wanted. I took my pass-key and went. I passed first through the smoking-room, next through the dressing-room, and so into the bed-room, which, to my intense astonishment, I found lighted up with a pair of wax candles, although I had left it in utter darkness barely a couple of hours before. What added to my surprise was the fact that the door between the bed-room and the library was open, and that the latter apartment was also lighted up. Having noted these things with a first intuitive glance round, my second glance went to the bed in search of M. Platzoff. He was not on it. On passing round the foot of the bed, I found him lying with his face on the floor. I lifted him up and saw at once that he was in some sort of fit. I was frightened, but did not lose my presence of mind. I had several times carried him out of the smoking-room when he was in one of his opium trances, and I had no difficulty now in lifting him up and laying him on the bed. As I turned round with the body in my arms, I saw something reflected in a large mirror opposite that nearly caused me to drop M. Platzoff to the ground. What I saw was the reflection from the lighted-up library of an oblong opening like a doorway in the bookshelves with which its walls were lined — an opening which, had it been there, I should hardly have missed noticing before, although I had not been above three or four times in the room. As soon as I had laid the unconscious Russian on his bed, I stole on tip-toe into the library. I had not been mistaken. There *was* an opening in the wall, formed by the sinking into a deep recess of a portion of the bookcase. In the recess thus formed was an iron door, now shut. As I looked, this question, without any consciousness on my own part, was put to me: *Can this be the entrance to some secret room in which the Diamond is hidden?*

"I had no time to consider the probability or otherwise of this question. Certain sounds from the other room drew me back at once to the side of M. Platzoff. Signs of returning consciousness were visible. I propped him up with the pillows, and sprinkled

water on his face, and chafed his hands. Slowly he came back to life. 'Better—better—all right now,' were his first words; then turning his lack-lustre eyes on me, 'Who are you?' he said. 'Ah, I remember—Jasmin,' he continued before I could reply. Then all of a sudden a frightened look came into his face, and he began to fumble nervously in the pocket of his velvet dressing-gown. 'What have you lost, sir? Is it anything I can find for you?' I asked. 'No, no,' he replied excitedly; 'only my key—only my key. Ah! here it is,' he cried a moment later, as he brought into view from one of his pockets a curiously-shaped key, the like of which I had never seen before. With a great sigh of relief he sank back on his pillows.

"'Go and wake up Wrigley, and tell him to give you some cognac,' he said next minute. 'A little brandy is all I need at present.'

"I left the room to carry out his request, and was not away more than five minutes. As I handed him the cognac I glanced stealthily at the mirror. The opening in the library wall was no longer visible. The mirror reflected an unbroken array of shelves closely packed with books. M. Platzoff had evidently felt himself strong enough to get out of bed and fasten the secret door during my absence.

"He drank a little of the brandy and then told me that I might go back to bed. I proffered to sit up in the next room during the remainder of the night. But he would not hear of it: only, he said, he would have the lights kept burning. I had got my hand on the door when he called me back. 'Look here, Jasmin,' he said. 'It is my particular wish that not to anyone shall you say a single word respecting what has happened to-night. Not even to Cleon must you mention it. Obey me in this and you will find that I shall not forget you. Disobey me, and I shall be sure to hear of it. What say you?'

"Of course I promised all he asked, and he seemed tolerably easy in his mind when I left him. I satisfied Cleon's curiosity with a passable excuse, and then went back to bed.

"M. Platzoff is lying later than usual this morning. Consequently I have an hour or two to myself, which I now employ in finishing this report. Write to me as soon as possible after receipt of it, and let me have your opinion as to what my next step ought to be. Cleon will be able to resume his duties in two or three days, and when that event takes place I shall be relegated to my old position, and shall have little or no personal communication with M. Platzoff.

"Your affectionate Son,

"J. M."

*(To be continued.)*

## RECALLING PAST HAPPINESS.

THE famous lines of Dante which he puts into the mouth of Francesca di Rimini in the fifth Canto of the "Inferno" have been more misquoted and interpreted with purblind perversity than perhaps any others. The lines are—

"Nessun maggior dolore
Che ricordarsi nell' tempo felice
Nella miseria."

(There is no greater sorrow than to recall a time of happiness *in misery*). But we have over and over again seen them quoted as though the words, *Nella miseria*, had never been used by the poet, nor even glanced at by him. And yet they are the most important part of the expression. Without them the words would hardly have any definite meaning. Lord Tennyson, in his "Locksley Hall," has borrowed from Dante, but he has some blame to bear in relation to them because he leaves the words "nella miseria" to be understood, whereas they ought to have been expressed with emphasis. For it is not true, and it is not what the poet sings :—

"That a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things."

There is no sorrow necessarily in remembering happier things while we are still happy. The difference between the positive and the superlative degree does not emphasise itself in such a soul-shadowing manner. To recall a happier time may only make the present more roseate, cause a quickening thrill in the blood. It does not cast a shadow, nor emphasise shadows existing. But we all know that light falling alongside a shadow intensifies it—makes it darker, the light of memory casing the black cloud of present misery intensifies it by the sense of contrast. It is the depth of present misery that measures the degree of sorrow in recalling past happiness; and the Laureate has himself in "In Memoriam" far more truly expressed the philosophy of the experience :

"Or is it that the past doth win
A glory from its being far,
And orbs into the perfect star
We saw not when we walked therein."

The misery of the present is exaggerated by the exaggeration of the happiness of the past—both are intensified by being brought into too direct association in the mind; and the very lack of power through effort of will and cheerful activity to dissipate the association produces the morbidity that further and further exaggerates on both sides. Milton said, "To be weak is to be miserable;" and the ideal and morbid

dwelling on and heightening of the impression by sense of contrast is that in which the misery lies. It is only another way of saying what Shakespeare with his cheerful philosophy so often dwelt on

Merely general regrets for opportunities lost, and for time wasted, is not what Dante wishes to express—these are common to all, however free from definite fault or vice of their own, and he who has best used his time will the more keenly feel how much more he might have done. He has the true measure of possibilities and can rigidly apply his standard. The little done only reveals the much that remains to do. A recent writer thus draws one of the distinctions that are implied in what we have said to regain for Dante's phrase in the famous quotation its true place—"Nella Miseria!"—

"To review lost happiness is the saddest work on earth; but to review happiness *lost by our own evil*, this is torment inexpressible. The pain is seldom erased; now and then comparison with those worse than ourselves brings a certain balm to the mind, but soon even this consolation loses its power, and we fall back into 'If I had only done this or that.'"

A. H. Japp, LL.D.

## UNDER THE PINES.

The solemn song is over, for the wind has left the pines
All silent; with their stately heads drawn up in serried lines;
Their music hushed, as though they wait a message from on high,
They stand like sentinels of God, against the crimson sky.

The afterglow arises now to paint the fading West,
And send its flaming messengers to cry the hour of rest;
Then dark within the encircling Night, the fragrant branches sway;
The sweetest song that they can sing breaks forth at dawn of day.

So still they stand as daylight dies, and twilight beckons Night,
That e'en the passing buzzards pause and, lingering, alight;
While midst the shadowed canopies of never fading green,
The sparkling play of firefly gay, at hide and seek, is seen.

The hush of Night is broken, for the fragrant branches sway
And rustle midst the wandering winds that wait the dawn of day;
Mysterious choirs of voices rise like sea-waves on the shore,
And fill the darkened Pinelands with the ocean's solemn roar.

Ada M. Trotter.

# COUNTESS CLARA.

IT was one morning in last October that my wife, with a rather overdone air of indifference, tossed a large gold-lettered card across the breakfast-table to me. In it, with some surprise and, I do not deny, considerable gratification, I found that the pleasure of my company and that of Mrs. Conyers at dinner was requested by our new neighbours at Castle Beauvoir.

We had called on the Morels soon after their arrival, and they had returned the visit with flattering promptitude; but I had no reason to suppose that our acquaintance had advanced to such a point of intimacy as to warrant an invitation to so special an affair as this. We, in common with half the county round, had been bidden to an At Home at the castle, on the occasion of the heiress's coming of age, but the dinner-party that preceded it was understood to include only the house-party and some very distinguished guests.

"Why should they have asked *us*, Nellie?" I demanded, speculating on the possibility of Mr. Morel having known my brother at Oxford, or met my uncle, the attaché, at Vienna, or perhaps having read and been struck with my article on "The Ethics of Psychology" in the *Contemporary*. It was too much to hope that a new-comer—a man from the City—should be aware of our connection with one of the oldest families in the county ——

I broke off my conjectures abruptly. Nellie was not paying the slightest attention, but was gazing intently at her own absurd reflection in the silver coffee-pot, her brow wrinkled in deep calculation.

"Velvet *really* is cheaper than satin in the long run—or good velveteen—you would never know the difference, and Liberty's art shades are *too* lovely! I must send for patterns. What were you saying, dear? I beg your pardon—the invitation? Oh, *that's* Miss Morel's doing, of course; one can see that she decides everything. She took an immense fancy to you, I could see; in fact, she told me so. You look 'so strong and capable,' she whispered, in her queer, shy little way."

"Much obliged. I hope the rest of the family may share that opinion when they require medical attendance. I wonder if Dr. Grimshaw is invited?"

"Only to the At Home. Mrs. Grimshaw will be so savage when she hears we are to dine there, but neither of you will ever be wanted professionally. Miss Morel has been under Sir Humphrey Driver's care since she was a baby. He doesn't seem to have done her much good; she is terribly frail and delicate."

"Spoilt, like most only children. Wants more fresh air and less

coddling. I should stop her tea and carriage exercise, put her on a pony, and send her errands about the country lanes, give her a glass of port wine and a cut of mutton, not too much done, for luncheon."

"Charles! You are simply brutal. However, I wish they would consult you about her. It would be some compensation for the trial to one's feelings of seeing all these strangers here in the place of the poor dear de Beauvoirs."

"We might have waited long enough for an invitation to dinner from the poor dear de Beauvoirs," I commented.

"Perhaps. But one feels for an old family scattered and effaced. The Morels can never be the same to the county."

"I sincerely hope not. The county is to be congratulated on the exchange. The Morels live sober and God-fearing lives—pay their bills, and will subscribe to the Dispensary."

"Money! Money! The first thing and the last in men's minds always," sighed my wife, putting me in the wrong as usual, and we dropped the subject.

When Sir Ralph de Beauvoir of Castle Beauvoir immediately on the death of his father announced his intention of selling the estate that had been in the family for more than five centuries and spending the rest of his days in the more congenial atmosphere of Paris, the county in general and the village of Shotacre in particular felt as if the floodgates of society had indeed burst open, as Sir Leicester Dedlock was wont to observe, and the Throne, Altar, and British Constitution were visibly tottering to their immediate fall. The de Beauvoirs had been for generations "bankrupt in purse and in character worse," better known than respected on the turf, bad landlords, bad neighbours, bad citizens, and alternately fool and blackguard for the last few generations, but they were de Beauvoirs of Beauvoir, a name of splendid traditions, and their glorious past cast a halo that bedazzled the critics of their ignoble present. Shotacre refused to be consoled, and glowered askance at the Morels, the wealthy banker and his family who had the audacity to come and live in the very place which they had paid for.

Even my wife indulged in more than one sigh to the memory of the departed de Beauvoirs as we drove up the long ascent to the Castle on the night of the heiress's birthday. We crossed the mighty drawbridge and entered the Castle-court under the threatening teeth of the portcullis. All was silent and empty. Ours were the only wheels that had furrowed the smooth-swept yellow gravel.

"Have we mistaken the time?" Nellie asked in trepidation.

"Or the day?" I added, fumbling for the invitation card.

The front door was flung open, and a glow of hospitable light issued, in which I made out the date to be correct, and the hour clanged from the clock-tower overhead as we entered. A change

indeed from the de Beauvoirs' time. Dust, must, rust, and cobwebs had disappeared from the great hall. The old, faded, flapping tapestries had been cleaned and properly mounted, the matchless oak carvings of the staircase carefully restored, there were Oriental rugs underfoot, trophies of arms and antlers on the wall, piles of hot-house flowers and palms in every corner, while the range of mail-clad figures that had skulked rusty and cobwebbed in their dark niches, now stood forth bravely, burnished and begilt, one mailed hand grasping sword or lance, the other holding aloft a torch blazing cheerily.

We ascended the staircase in admiring silence. It ended in a vast saloon or ante-chamber, from which the drawing-room opened at one end and the picture-gallery at the other.

It was sparsely furnished with hangings and divans of yellow satin, and some handsome marquetrie cabinets containing rare china. Portraits of the de Beauvoirs had overflowed from the picture galleries on to its walls, and before one of them I saw a little white figure standing in rapt attention.

It was Miss Morel, looking more than ever like a frail little white moth, as she flitted towards us in her gauzy dress with a subdued sheen of satin and sparkle of diamonds about her.

"Oh, I am so glad to see you," she cried in her musical, half-hushed little voice. "That is, if you will excuse the mistake which I see has been made in your invitation. They had all to be re-written at the last moment. My godfather could not be here in time. I was in such a hurry to send off yours that I have been afraid since that it went before the correction was made. Will you forgive me?"

We made the necessary polite assurances, and she went on, half-eager, half-shy. "I am so glad to have you all to myself for a little. No one knows you are here but me. Will you come and see the conservatories?" She took my wife's hand in childish fashion, and led her through one of the French windows into a sort of wide glass passage, full of exotics, ending in a great palace of flowers that had been niched into an angle of the inner court or tilt-yard.

"Do you know where you are?" she asked. "The old refectory is under us. Mother must have her flowers; they are her one great pleasure, but we have spoilt the place as little as we could. Everything can be cleared away without leaving a trace."

I wondered why she should say this, and at her tone of apology, but Nellie understood her better.

"I think your conservatories harmonise admirably with the rest of the building. You see, the great old pile has been growing by additions in every generation, and a nineteenth century de Beauvoir would have had as much right to make himself at home in it as a fifteenth century one had to the great hall, or the de Beauvoir who served under Marlborough to your Queen Anne drawing-room."

She looked pleased, and when we had made the round of the

orchids and the mighty chrysanthemums, brought us to her favourite seat, in a nook at the far end, under some spreading palms. Below us lay the wide expanse of the tilt-yard, still in shadow, and just opposite the dark mass of the ruined chapel. Through one great fragment, pierced by an exquisitely-proportioned and still perfect archway, we could see the interior, with its splintered columns and moss-grown monuments.

"The moon will be high enough presently to light the chancel," Miss Morel whispered. "Is it not all sad? I sit here and dream of restoring it—if I had but the right. I have made out the inscriptions on some of the tombs: they are all dead-and-gone de Beauvoirs. Sir Ralph said we might turn it into a good billiard-room! Did he mean to insult us? Does he think that because we are not noble we have no sense of decency?"

"I should imagine that Sir Ralph spoke in pure good faith. The memories of his forefathers never appealed to him very powerfully."

"Ah! is that possible?" she cried excitedly. "Such a history! Such a past! Why, it should be almost a religion to the descendants. It must be to the worthy ones. If you knew what a miserable interloper I feel here! Our money has given us the advantage over them in their necessity ——"

This was too great nonsense for even Nellie to stand.

"My dear, it was the gaming-table and the turf that brought the de Beauvoirs of this generation into their difficulties. It was uncommonly lucky that they had your money to fall back upon."

I took up the word. "The de Beauvoirs of old won their position by doing their duty bravely to their king and country. The de Beauvoirs of to-day have lost it by forgetting they owe duty to anyone. Think of your tenants, for instance, and the blessing it will be to them that such a man as your father should be put in the place of that profligate spendthrift, Sir Ralph."

It was a new idea to her. Her face brightened. I went on:

"The Vicar looks ten years younger since someone has come to take half the burden of the parish wretchedness off his shoulders. Instead of cherishing a romantic regard for your predecessors' memory, Miss Morel, the best thing you can do is to turn to and try to efface the mischief and misery they have caused here. A better work than even restoring the chapel."

Her eyes had looked earnestly into mine. Now they wavered, and a sort of cloud gathered over her face. "I am wanted; I must not stay here," she whispered; and even while she spoke she rose and walked away hurriedly. We followed her into the drawing-room, where some of the guests staying in the house had already assembled.

Mrs. Morel, a comely, grey-haired lady, magnificently dressed, welcomed us warmly. "I am so glad you have been making friends with Veronica. She is so shy, I cannot get her to be sociable with anyone except Countess Clara and some of the old women in the village."

Miss Morel had left us and gone to the other end of the long room, where a lady with lovely fair hair and a ruby velvet gown was sitting in a low chair near the fire, surrounded by nearly all the gentlemen of the party. Miss Morel stood before her like a little school-girl called up for a lesson.

"Yes, that is Countess Clara," Mrs. Morel said, following the direction of my eyes. "I never call her anything else, because they all laugh so when I try to pronounce her other name. She is Austrian or Hungarian, or something of the sort. When we went to Ischl last summer, while this place was being made habitable, Veronica took a most extraordinary fancy to her, followed her about like a little dog, and wouldn't be happy till we invited her here. I'll introduce her presently. You'll like her."

Here Mr. Morel came up, a bright-eyed, grey-haired man, with a pointed beard and rather distinguished air. He briefly made us welcome, and held out a note to his wife.

"What is it, dear? I haven't my glasses," she said. "From the Twysden-Browns? An answer at last!"

"A refusal; at the last minute, and with no excuse," he replied grimly.

I knew the family in question, and made no doubt they were merely passing on to the Morels some of the slights and snubs which Sir Ralph was wont freely to bestow on them.

"Well, it's their loss," said Mrs. Morel cheerfully and forgivingly. "And it's all for the best. The Bishop has brought his chaplain, and we should have been rather crowded."

Then guest after guest was announced in quick succession, including, as Nellie observed, with a spiteful joy, people whom the Twysden-Browns would have given half a year's income to be friendly with.

I found myself placed at dinner between the vacant chair that should have held Mrs. Twysden-Brown and a handsome, speechless lady with a fine appetite, who left me at leisure to look about me and contrast the splendours of my present entertainment with the squalid repast of cold, broken meat that was set before me after a night's attendance on Sir Ralph in the clutches of delirium tremens, the only meal I had ever partaken of under the de Beauvoirs' roof.

Miss Morel sat directly opposite me, looking very bright and pretty. Her health was duly proposed by her godfather, a foreign nobleman with a red ribbon in his button-hole, and her neighbour, the Bishop, replied for her with much courtly clerical gallantry. She was laughing and prompting him, when I saw her stop suddenly. Her lips apart, her eyes wavering, and the same cloudy look that I had seen before gathering over her face. Her eyes passed over me without seeing me, and then fixed themselves on the vacant chair beside me, dilating as if with horror. Her hands clutched the edge of the table, her breath seemed to fail. Would she faint or shriek? The Bishop's witticisms were convulsing the table; his portly form screened her

from observation. No one saw her but I. What could it be? I fixed my eyes on hers, as if I could read the reflection in her face. She must, she *should* withdraw her gaze and meet mine. I willed it desperately, imperiously. A mist gathered round us, the room, the brilliant lights and flowers, the laughing faces, all disappeared, everything but Miss Morel's strained, horror-struck dark eyes. Slowly, reluctantly, they flickered aside from the point on which they were fixed—they turned and met mine. I drew a long breath of relief. Lights, flowers, faces righted themselves; the butler at my elbow was proffering some unknown vintage, and Miss Morel, rather pale, but smiling, was leaning back in her chair, softly swaying her plumy fan as the Bishop reseated himself.

It was a curious half-minute's experience. I had no time left for wonderment, however. As the ladies rose and left us, a note was brought to me; I groaned as I recognised it. Did I ever dine out or was I ever called in to an urgent case without one of old Mrs. Wilkinson's bad attacks coming on? They would kill her eventually, I knew; and she had been a good friend to me; so I was bound to go, and turned out into the night resignedly. As I expected, it proved merely a fit of nerves this time, which subsided as soon as I was found to be within call, and I made such good speed back to the castle that I arrived with the last detachment of guests pouring in for the At Home.

The band in the picture gallery was playing the concluding bars of the second dance of the programme, and a celebrated "Society Clown" was about to commence his entertainment in the library, whither the company was flocking as I ascended the staircase.

The music seemed to break off confusedly as I gained the landing; there was a rush of footsteps, a woman's scream, a fall. I forced my way in the direction and found Mrs. Morel in the doorway of the picture gallery on her knees beside her daughter, who lay white and insensible in my wife's arms, while her partner, a tall young man with an eye-glass, stood near looking wholly disconcerted and uncomfortable.

"She's dead! she's dead! Oh, fetch Sir Humphrey, someone," Mrs. Morel was beginning to shriek; but Nellie, who has always her wits about her, stopped her. "She's all right, she *really* is; don't frighten Mr. Morel for nothing." She put the girl into my arms and picked up the poor lady with scant ceremony.

"Just go first and show the way to Miss Morel's room; and, Sir Edward, please start the dancing again."

Off went the youth readily, and Nellie, who had been dexterously blocking the doorway and preventing the egress of any of the spectators, begged them to go on dancing. "Miss Morel was all right and in the doctor's hands."

I had fortunately not far to follow poor Mrs. Morel's faltering footsteps. The room was close at hand. I placed my burden on a

couch and commenced to throw open the windows, directing Mrs. Morel to unloose the bodice of her dress and send for restoratives.

"Can I do anything to help?" asked a pleasant voice at the door. It was Countess Clara, and I welcomed the sight of her strong, capable face.

"Pegging your pardon, putt that iss my place, yess, indeed! Miss Morel's own nurse, sir, Gwen Williams."

Countess Clara stood aside good-humouredly and let a little figure in black satin with a stupendous cap bustle past her, then, with a smile and nod, retreated.

Mrs. Williams pushed Mrs. Morel's fumbling fingers aside without ceremony and quickly unlaced the satin bodice with many a muttered exclamation. She ordered the good lady off despotically to fetch a certain bottle from the medicine chest, and when she was safely out of the way, looked sharply up at me with her beady black eyes. "What will it be, doctor?"

The truth blurted from my lips, "Upon my soul I cannot say."

It was not an ordinary faint, still less an hysteric sham. The pulse beat strong and regular in the slender white wrist, the breath came as in a deep sleep. Her brow was knit and her teeth set, the face was that of one beholding some terrible vision, and a short shuddering sigh escaped her lips.

None of Mrs. Williams's efforts had roused her. I wished with all my heart Sir Humphrey had been summoned, and proposed to go for him.

"No, no!" the old woman cried energetically. "You are no wiser than he, but you are honest and civil, and maybe you will listen to old Gwen; you are not so grand."

"What do you know about it? Has it happened before?"

"Never in all her life till we came to this unlucky place. It's killing her, Doctor, dear—yes, indeed!" The little woman indulged in an awful grimace to stop her falling tears, and with a sob and a sniff continued: "Just the brightest, merriest little child she was, white and whisht, but never sick till now."

"What do you say it is, then?" I asked with becoming humility, relieved to see the drawn features commence to relax, and a flicker of the eyelids.

"Hush! She's been *overlooked*—though dear knows how or when. I have searched to find a mark on her beautiful white skin, and I've combed her hair over and over lest it shall be the nine knots that they have made in it—or the dried frog's foot sewn into her skirts—or they have given it to her in her first drink of milk in the morning——"

"'It.' What?" But she only shook her head violently as the door opened and Mrs. Morel re-entered. Simultaneously her daughter sighed once or twice and unclosed her pretty dark eyes, drawing her hand across them like an awakened child.

"Why, Mammie, where am I? What has happened? Did you think I had fainted? I was only giddy. It was Lord Edward's waltzing; he goes round and round like a humming-top."

She looked quite bright and alert, and turned briskly to Mrs. Williams to have her dress adjusted. She had not noticed me, so putting my finger on my lips with a meaning look at Mrs. Morel, I slipped from the room.

I met Sir Humphrey on the staircase, told him just as much as I thought fit, and left the case in his hands.

I saw nothing more of Castle Beauvoir for some weeks after. My time was too fully taken up by my work. Poor old Mrs. Wilkinson died in real earnest at last, and it was a sickly season amongst my parish patients. Other business was on my hands as well. There were local authorities to be stirred up to their duties, sanitary acts to be put in force, tumble-down cottages to be made wind and water-proof before winter set in more sharply, typhoid nests to be routed out, unwholesome ponds drained and ditches cleaned; the neglect of three generations to be repaired on the de Beauvoir estate, a task that no one but Mr. Morel with his inexhaustible energy and ample resources could have undertaken light-heartedly.

The amount of work he got through was prodigious, and when the better sort amongst his tenants and neighbours began to understand and co-operate with him, the Vicar and I felt that there was indeed a good time coming for Shotacre at last.

Nellie paid the necessary visit of ceremony at the castle, and reported that all the guests had left. Miss Morel did not appear, and Mrs. Morel seemed low-spirited, could talk of nothing but her daughter's failing health, and her want of confidence in Sir Humphrey, who declined to pay any attention to her account of Miss Morel's fainting-fits.

"Miss Morel's fainting-fits." They had happened again, then. I wished indeed that I had time and opportunity to observe them for my own satisfaction. I was haunted by a certain resemblance between her and a girl whom I had once seen in a mesmeric trance. It was in my young days at Cambridge, long before Hypnotism had been elevated to the dignity of a subject of scientific discussion. We called it Electro-Biology, and went to the séances of a foreign lady-professor for fun, after which we practised on one another by way of a joke till the fashion died out. Luckily I had sense enough even then to perceive the mischief I might do by playing with such an edged-tool, and solemnly pledged myself to myself that nothing but the direst need should make me employ the mesmeric power of which I found myself possessed.

I had kept faith with myself loyally hitherto, and the gift had lain idle, except for the dispelling of some old woman's tic-doloureux, or to relieve the Vicar's bad attacks of insomnia, and the busy life I

led in this out-of-the-way region prevented my ever taking up the subject as a serious study.

I thought of Gwen Williams, and wondered if the theory I was unconsciously forming were one whit more irrational than hers.

"Overlooked"—"Hypnotised"—which for choice? "I must confer with my fellow-scientist," I declared to myself, but on inquiry I found she had gone away with Mrs. and Miss Morel, and the next week a series of alarming circumstances effectually diverted my attention. The first shock came from the Vicar.

"Have you heard that Mr. Morel has withdrawn his candidature for the County Council?" he asked with a disturbed face.

"No. Why? The very man we want there."

He nodded gravely. "And the works at the quarry are to be stopped next month." I was horribly disconcerted by this change of plan, but possessed my soul in patience.

Next day it was Dr. Grimshaw who stopped me to shake hands, showing all his ugly yellow old teeth in a spiteful grin.

"So you are to lose your good friend up at the castle, eh? Look here." He hauled out a paper giving a report that a certain semi-official post in Egypt had been offered to and accepted by Mr. Gustavus Morel, well-known in financial circles ——

"I don't believe it," I said contemptuously, and left him cackling maliciously.

Mrs. Twysden-Brown was the last and worst. She made her big carriage draw up in a muddy lane to greet Nellie, who was riding with me, and I saw by her face she was going to be disagreeable.

"I couldn't help stopping you, dear. I felt I *must* have someone to share the good news with! *Aren't* you delighted? Not heard? *Think* of having the *dear* de Beauvoirs back again! Oh, I know it's true. Mr. Twysden-Brown had it from Sir Ralph himself; I read the letter. We are not to keep it a secret. *What* a welcome home he will have!"

"It's the worst piece of news Shotacre has heard for many a day, and I'm sincerely sorry to hear it," spoke out Nellie—bless her; and disposed of Mrs. Twysden-Brown with a curt adieu. We rode homewards dejectedly through the evening gloom, till Nellie drew rein at the cross-cut to the castle.

"Charlie, you'll be wretched till you know the truth. Ride up there and find out." I took her advice.

I found Mr. Morel in his library before a table covered with maps, plans, specifications, photographs of buildings, etc. He was not looking at any one of them. He sat, staring into vacancy, his head resting on his hands, in the blackest of brown studies, till I got within range of his lamp, when he started and greeted me cordially.

I was in no mood to approach the subject of which my mind was full diplomatically, even if that were ever possible in dealings with

Mr. Morel, and in five minutes had blurted out my news and my fears.

He sighed heavily before he answered. "News flies fast here. I was coming to tell you all this to-morrow myself."

I dropped back in my chair with an actual physical pain at my heart, such as I had never heard of or believed possible in like circumstances.

"Castle Beauvoir has been in the market for the last week. I was assured on all sides that there was no possible chance of a tenant being found, but this morning came Sir Ralph's offer. I wonder if I am committing a great piece of iniquity in allowing that scamp to return to his old position? His misdeeds and those of his father and grandfather are so inextricably mixed that it is impossible to apportion the due share to each. Adversity may have taught him something. I intend that he shall be tightly bound to the engagements I have entered into with his tenants, and I will leave all in order that you and the Vicar shall not be stopped in any of your schemes of usefulness ——" he broke off at the sight of my face.

"Sir Ralph de Beauvoir back amongst us!" I groaned in despair.

"He is older and steadier now, and really writes with much proper feeling about his old home." I shook my head uncheered. "Besides, money sometimes brings its own virtues with it. He may die a saint and a miser, who knows?"

"Money? Whose? How has he come by it?"

"How he is going to raise the purchase money is more than I can tell you, but the property he must and will have at any cost. It is an indispensable condition of his marriage with an American millionairess. She hesitates between him and the penniless younger son of a marquis. The feudal castle will turn the scale. She is descended herself from one of the oldest families in the pork line in Chicago, and is naturally prejudiced in favour of ancient lineage—the Marquis is so very new."

He was talking with forced jocularity, but gave up the effort. "Conyers, I'm grieved—grieved from the bottom of my heart to do this; but if you knew what I have gone through in the last month you'd pity me. It's to save my girl's life or reason I'm doing it. Heaven grant it's not too late!"

What could he mean?

"It was the fancy she took to this accursed place that made me buy it, nearly a year ago," he began, after a short silence. "She was keen to settle down in the country, in a home of our very own; she wanted to make friends with everyone, and to play the Lady Bountiful in the village, and have some duties in life, she said—my good little girl! I liked the thought. Now that I have given up business, I indulged in dreams of training my daughter to administer the wealth that shall be hers nobly and wisely. We were happy here—so happy when we first came, planning restorations and changes,

which we left to be carried out while we went abroad for a few months. She counted the days to our home-coming—and so did I. Then—from the day she first set foot in the place, she suddenly changed. She grew at first only listless and dull, moped in the picture gallery, or wandered about the old chapel all day, and seemed to avoid meeting new people. Then her dislike to the place grew active; she told me passionately that it was killing her; she begged me to take her away at once, as far as possible. That was just after her birthday. Sir Humphrey Driver came down—talked of hysteria-monomania—referred me to a specialist. I had him down here. He examined her, and kept her under constant observation for some time, and says she is as sane as I am. But she is dying—my little Vera is slipping away from me," he ended with a sob.

"Have you tried change?"

"She went with her mother and her old nurse to a place that was recommended, but she grew so much worse there that we brought her home yesterday. I *must* make an end of it. If I lose her, what have I left? Maybe she is right when she says the curse on the de Beauvoirs will cling to us while we hold their lands."

"Fudge!" I said, but only in my inmost soul.

"Come and see her," he said, starting up. "You are a favourite of hers. Nurse Gwen was urgent that I should consult you, but with Sir Humphrey ——"

I gave a nod of comprehension. "Mrs. Williams has her own theory of Miss Morel's delicacy."

He looked annoyed. "Absurd old creature! I had to be very angry with her—she almost insulted one of our guests in her crazy fits."

"Perhaps what I am going to suggest may seem to you as crazy," I began; and, once started, gave Mr. Morel the benefit of my wild imaginings. He was too polite to give a sign of disbelief, but he gave none of assent either. He heard me to the end, and then led the way to the drawing-room.

We came upon a pretty group in the firelight. Mrs. Morel sat on a low chair, her daughter leaning against her knee. Vera had got possession of her mother's hand and was caressing it as she kept up a soft little murmur of talk. Mrs. Morel's comely face had grown careworn, and her lips twitched nervously as she spoke. Vera sprang up to meet us. Such a wasted little hand she placed in mine! Mr. Morel demanded tea, and she went off to pour it out for us. She wore a loose sort of dress, "a tea-gown of eau-de-nil satin, hand embroidered in jet and silver, straight from Vienna" (interpolated by Nellie), which hid her figure but made her face look almost corpse-like in hue, and her great eyes shone like the jet stars on her gown—an altogether weird effect. While I talked, she moved to and fro uneasily, and finally disappeared into the conservatory; I could catch the glint of her gown as she passed out into the moonshine at the far end.

Mr. Morel was called away by a servant with a note requiring answering, and I was left to talk to his wife. She began at once on her grief at leaving and seeking another home. Even Mr. Morel's wealth would not stand keeping up another such establishment unless he got rid of this one—and that was what Vera insisted on. Nothing less would satisfy her.

I spoke out energetically. I enlarged upon Mr. Morel's work, described the miserable, God-forgotten state of the place before his coming, the want, vice, ignorance, that had thriven like evil weeds fostered by the neglect and wrong-doing of generations. "The de Beauvoirs were a curse to the land, their property a plague-spot on the face of the earth——"

I broke off suddenly, for Vera was standing behind me; she had drawn near unnoticed while I spoke more strongly and at length than I knew. Too strongly for poor Mrs. Morel's nerves. She gave a sob or two, then jumped up with her handkerchief at her eyes, and made for the door. Veronica ran to her with outstretched arms, but her mother made a gesture of avoidance and rushed from the room, leaving the girl standing there, a picture of dumb, bewildered misery.

"What am I doing?" she demanded of me with the woful, wistful look that made me think I knew not why of "a spirit in prison."

Mr. Morel entered. He must have met his wife, I think, for he asked no explanation, but walked up to his daughter, looking eagerly at her. "What is it, Vera? Tell Dr. Conyers."

Again the look, as of a dumb animal in cruel pain. She tried to speak, but choked, stopped, and shook her head. "I cannot. If I only could—" I fancied I heard. Then she suddenly seized my arm. "Help me. Make me tell you," she cried, in an odd, strangled voice.

I looked inquiringly at Mr. Morel.

"Try what you like, in Heaven's name," he answered.

I told her what I wished to do, and she assented dully. Never, in spite of her willingness, have I had a more difficult subject to deal with. It was as if I were wrestling with some powerful counter-influence external to the girl that must be overcome before I could bend her will to mine. I was faint and exhausted before she yielded, at last, and sank back in slumber in her chair.

Mr. Morel looked on, half-angry, half-curious. "Ask her why she will not live here?"

"They will not let me. We have no right here. They will not rest till we go.

"Who?"

"They—the faces that I see everywhere. They hunt me night and day. They mean to hunt me into my grave. If I live to take possession they will kill me. Save me! Take me away while there is time. Give it back! Give it back."

She struggled fiercely, her face grew distorted with terror, a thin line of foam appeared on her lips. I passed my hand over her

forehead. "They are gone. Do you hear me. They are gone," I said, authoritatively.

Her features became calm; she smiled, relieved. "They are gone."

"You dreamt them?"

"I dreamt them."

"When did you dream them first?"

"On my birthday. There was an empty place at the table. When I looked I saw him there. The one with the dark brows and wicked look. He leant on the table and looked up and down, blighting you all with his burning eyes."

"And the next?"

"When I was dancing I saw him standing in the doorway, and as I passed, he stretched out a cold hand and caught my shoulder—A—h—h!"

"They are only dreams, remember. After that?"

"They come so fast I can hardly tell you. They look out at me from amongst the trees in the wood; they peep round the pillars of the church. They stare and gibber in at the windows from the dusk outside. I feel cold breath on my neck, and I turn, and two eyes glare into mine. I know what they all say though I cannot tell the words."

"Why could you not tell all this sooner?"

"I was prevented."

"By whom?"

Again the struggle and the slight convulsion passing over her face. I was nervous; I dared not prolong the experiment.

"You will never see them more. There, I have sent them away. Now I have made you forget them." She sat perfectly quiet, smiling contentedly till I roused her.

"Have I been asleep in my chair while you two were talking?" she asked, with a laugh, rubbing her eyes with the pretty, childish gesture that I remembered.

I gave Mr. Morel a hint not to allow his wife to refer to the vexed question, prescribed early hours and plenty of outdoor exercise for my patient, and promised to call first thing in the morning.

"What has been the gain of all this?" Mr. Morel asked, gloomily, following me to the door. "We have discovered that the poor child has been tormented by hallucinations. Have you power sufficient to hold them at bay; and what is the extent and duration of that power?"

"Will you trust my honour and loyalty, and leave me to answer your questions by and by," I pleaded, for I was overdone and over-excited. I felt as if I had gone through some violent physical struggle. My horse had his wits about him, and brought me home with no assistance from me, and I stumbled blindly into my surgery, and dropping into a chair, fell into a heavy slumber.

I was awakened by a low tapping at the outside door. All the household were asleep, fancying that I had been called out again to some case, so I opened the door softly and found an odd little figure waiting on the step. Gwen Williams, with a big hood pinned over her cap, and a great cloak.

"Is anything wrong?" I asked anxiously. "Is Miss Morel ill?"

"Sleeping like an angel; that is why I left her. Tell me—what have you been doing to her, Doctor, *bach?*"

"What has brought you here?"

She sat down on a stool at the opposite side of my fire and nodded mysteriously. "I was right, was I not, eh? Overlooked she wass; and"—very mysteriously—"I know who did it."

She chuckled with delight at my look of surprise, nodded and winked cunningly. Then she folded her arms and leaned forward till the peak of her hood nearly touched my face.

"The day they were leaving us—all the ladies and gentlemen—I said, 'I will see was it one of you'; and I—listen, Doctor—I sprinkled the doorstep with a handful of blessed salt that I had from a wise woman in my own country, eh?"

I was too prudent to stop to make inquiries; I only nodded.

"They all passed over it when they said good-bye—all but her. She turned back—yes, indeed—and she went again; and then she turned back again, and then she sneezed, and I knew I had her!" Her face fell. "But the master was angry when I spoke, and wouldn't listen, and he let her go; but"—with another nod of triumph—"it was not by *that* door she went after all—no, indeed!"

"And who was she?"

"Her with the yellow hair—Countess Clara."

I was startled. For the second time the old woman's wits and mine had jumped to the same conclusion, on equally irrational grounds. I could get no further reason out of Gwen than the testimony of the blessed salt—whatever that might be; and my own idea was based only on Mrs. Morel's mention of her daughter's singular fancy for the woman, and a vague recollection of her manner on the one occasion when I saw them together.

Gwen hurried back to her post, leaving me to a hag-ridden night.

I was up at the castle next morning as early as I reasonably could appear. Mr. Morel was walking on the terrace with his cigar, Vera beside him. She came smiling up to me and greeted me with a little jest. I was pleased to see how devoid of consciousness her manner was. Mr. Morel I fancied was a trifle cool. I think he resented last night's experiment.

I went home and consulted Nellie. She has a way of knowing exactly what I want doing without troubling her head about my reasons.

"Of course, dear, you cannot keep on calling incessantly, especially as Mrs. Morel must not be made uneasy. I can look after Miss

Morel to-day. I promised to let her know when the Sunday-school prizes were to be given. If I go this morning they will keep me to luncheon, and I can stay till dusk and you can call to fetch me."

There is a certain eminent French savant with whom I once had occasion to correspond. He has of late years devoted himself to the study of the phenomena of Hypnotism. I decided on consulting him. Nellie reappeared before I had finished my letter that afternoon.

"They want us to dine there. The Vicar and Mrs. Boyd are coming. I've come down to dress and bring you back with me."

On our way there, Nellie told me that she had made exhaustive inquiries about Countess Clara. "I know all about her except her surname. It begins with S—z—c—h— and ends in ska, but that's as much as anybody knows. She's a genuine Countess, half English, visits in the best society, and was quite properly introduced to the Morels. Here's her address; I've written it down; I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I believe she is quite respectable."

Mrs. Morel seemed in excellent spirits and talked Christmas trees, magic-lantern entertainments and other village dissipations with the Vicar's wife all dinner-time, Vera joining in readily. The Vicar left us directly after dinner, leaving Mr. Morel and me to talk, across the walnuts and the wine.

"Here's something that may interest you," said Mr. Morel, pulling out a letter. "This is from the fair American, the future châtelaine. She is, above all, practical, and insists on coming to inspect the place for herself and assuring herself of my willingness to sell. Plans for the complete restoration on a magnificent scale are to be immediately prepared."

"And the rest of the property ——?"

"We must trust to philanthropy being so much the fashion. I thought she looked good-natured when I saw her once, but as hard and sharp as nails. The future of Shotacre will rest with her, not with Sir Ralph, if that is any comfort to you."

"It isn't."

"Conyers, I know you blame me for giving in, but what can I do? Can you engage to keep Veronica's mind for ever clear of those wretched hallucinations that make the place terrible to her. Your experiment last night was curious, but leads to nothing."

"I beg your pardon. It has revealed the existence of a sinister influence over Miss Morel's mind. Give me the chance of discovering it and destroying it. That is all I ask."

I told him of my letter to Dr. Quinet. He listened indifferently, but promised to make no further arrangements for the sale till the reply should come. The sudden opening of the door cut his sentence short. It was Nellie who entered, pale and scared.

"Oh, Charles! Mr. Morel! What is to be done? She's gone."

"Gone—who? Miss Morel? Where? When?" We sprang up in alarm and bewilderment.

"We were sitting together in the conservatory, when she just got up and walked away without a word to me. I waited some time and then went to look for her. A maid says she saw her go out a quarter of an hour ago. Nurse Williams and I have looked everywhere. Her fur cloak is gone and her hat, but no gloves, and in those thin little shoes ——"

"But why? Where should she go?" Mr. Morel demanded.

"Oh, how like a man!" cried Nellie in an agony of impatience. "Can't you form your theory while you are looking for her. Isn't it enough that she has gone—gone out into this winter night shoeless and gloveless—all alone and with a purse full of money ——"

"Ring the bell!" Mr. Morel cried to me. "We must send the servants ——"

"Stop!" cried Nellie, rising to the occasion, as usual. "You will frighten Mrs. Morel to death. She knows nothing. She and Mrs. Boyd are fast asleep over the drawing-room fire. They think we are in the billiard-room. Mrs. Williams has gone with a man to search the village and bring her back quietly if she is there. If she is not she must have taken the London road. Our dog-cart is at the door, and you can overtake her. I'll keep Mrs. Morel quiet. Perhaps she need never know."

We were off in five minutes, leaving Nellie to do her best. We had no time to speak as we drove along behind my smart little mare, looking sharply out at either side of the road. A thick, soaking mist hung over the land, which the moon was trying in vain to disperse. Once past the hedges and fences and scattered clumps of trees around the village the great South road stretched out before us, a white ribbon between flat spreading common land, strewn sparsely with tufts of gorse and heather. We drove for a mile or two, and then stopped and looked around. Right or left all was bare and lonely, with no covert for anything larger than a rabbit. "We should have passed her before this if we had been on the right road," I said; "let us try back." A few yards behind us another road branched off leading to the next village. Along it a stout farmer of my acquaintance came clumping heavily on his grey cob. I hailed him and questioned him. "No. He'd met nobody, unless maybe the mail-cart going to catch the London train." I thanked him, gave the mare a touch with the whip, and drove fast along the lane. His words brought into my mind a sudden recollection of a foot-path I had noticed, a short cut to the station from which the local train caught up the London mail at the junction.

"Why are we going this way?" demanded Mr. Morel. "Why should she be ——"

But we had reached the foot-path. I threw him the reins, and was over the stile and half-way across the first field before he had ended

his question. Another stile and another field, I ran and ran. Then a gate, left open in defiance of the notice above it, and in the field beyond a girl's figure.

She was walking slowly but steadily on. A bramble swaying from the hedge caught her skirt. She made no attempt to disengage herself. The dress tore away, but she never paused. I overtook her, treading heavily and whistling that she might not be startled; she never looked nor made way for me. "Miss Morel," I said, for now I was sure of her. She gave no sign of hearing, but walked on with the stony abstraction of a somnambulist. I caught her in my arms and held her tight. I commanded her with all the force of my will to obey me. She *must* stop and listen to me. She struggled blindly, then suddenly gave way, and fell senseless on my shoulder.

I could not rouse her. I shouted to Mr. Morel, and at last he came, and we carried her between us to the dog-cart, and I managed to support her while he drove home. Before we reached it her consciousness had returned, but I forbade her to speak till we had reached the castle, and I had given her safely into Gwen's faithful care.

Nellie had stood bravely at her post, coining I don't know how many innocent fictions, when Mrs. Morel became aware that her daughter was missing. She had actually not taken alarm when we re-entered the drawing-room.

Mr. Morel was beginning to thank me, but I stopped him.

"Your daughter is not safe yet. In Heaven's name let me try the one chance I see. It is a desperate one."

"What can I do?"

"Give me a fresh horse and twenty pounds—the bank is closed. I am going to do what your daughter was about to do when I stopped her. I can catch the night mail to London at the junction, and cross by the tidal train to-morrow for Paris."

The following evening, at the same hour, I was awaiting an interview with Countess Clara. I had bribed my way into her house, despite protestations and assurances that she could not receive me. I was in a small library, or boudoir, sounds of music and voices in conversation filtering in to me through a half-closed door. Rapid travelling had given my courage small time to cool, but apprehensions crowded on me thick and fast now. The madness of my errand was very plain to me, but I refused to dwell upon it. I looked at the books around me, the choice collections of prints and photographs, the costly bits of china and enamel—all the surroundings of a woman of culture and refinement. A small ivory shrine stood on the writing-table. I touched it idly, and it opened. Inside was a miniature—Sir Ralph de Beauvoir! I could not mistake him. The haggard face, with the self-indulgent mouth and drooping, cynical eyes. My fast-chilling courage flamed up again to furnace heat, and I shook my fist at him in defiance, and shut him up again. Then the door softly opened, and I turned to face Countess Clara.

Words cannot describe the polite, astonished contempt with which she regarded my travel-stained, dusty self. She spoke civilly, but she meant to make me uncomfortable, and succeeded.

She waited for me to speak, not asking me to be seated or giving me the slightest encouragement.

"I have come here from your friend, Mr. Morel," I began. "You have heard that he is about to sell Castle Beauvoir?"

I detected a flash of triumph in her eyes, but she simply raised her fine eyebrows and waited further enlightenment.

"You know why he does so?"

"I believe his daughter's health was not good there—or she fancied so. A castle more or less is not much to him," she said carelessly.

"It means a good deal to him, as it happens, if this one has cost his daughter her life or her reason."

"Pardon me. How am I concerned in this?"

"You can explain that best yourself, Countess. In my attendance on Miss Morel I have discovered that she has fallen under some powerful influence—malign influence, I would say. Seek the influence. I have done so. Yours. Next, seek the motive. That is what I am here for."

She stepped backwards to the door by which she had entered, opened it, and spoke rapidly to someone within. There followed a titter and sundry exclamations. I gathered that she pronounced me to be either mad or drunk, and they were to stand by to assist her. It exasperated but did not disconcert me. Then she came up to me and spoke soothingly. "You are overtired with your journey, dear Dr. Conyers, otherwise I should have begged you to join our party; but come and breakfast with me to-morrow and you shall put me to the question as much as you will. For the present, adieu."

"I shall stay here till I get an answer," I replied doggedly; though I felt my false position, and was uneasily conscious of spectators gathering at the half-open door. A merry little black-eyed lady foremost, and two tall gentlemen with eye-glasses behind her.

The Countess gave a tolerant laugh. "Answer! What answer can I give you, Doctor? If I tell you I have no influence over that poor child, will you believe me? No. Then, if I say I have, what can you do? Can you prevent it?"

"I can, but I would rather not."

"You are wise," she sneered. Then with her serene, good-tempered smile: "Miss Morel is my dear friend. You cannot suppose that I should wish harm to the poor little creature?"

"You would not spare her in Sir Ralph's interests. You are playing his game unscrupulously. You knew the only way to drive Mr. Morel to restore the place to him." I was hitting blindly now, my judgment and temper were giving way.

She kept silence, well-contented. From the doorway came a murmur of surprise and admiration. I lost my head entirely.

"*What* is your object? What good can it do you? Mr. Morel will pay you twice the money to set his daughter free from this bondage. It cannot be for Sir Ralph's own sake? You are not his mother or his sister. He cannot be your lover or husband. You would never play this despicable part just to help him to a rich American wife——"

The chorus at the door rose to shrieks of amazement mingled with a shrill malicious giggle. Countess Clara stood calm and magnificent, but ghastly pale; her eyes piercing me through and through. "A rich American wife!" she repeated. "Tell me who she is, and how you know."

I told her. She listened with fixed attention, unmoved, except for a certain grim whitening and tightening of her lips. When I had done, she turned to the spectators, who now had opened the door wide and came crowding into the room. "And you all? What have you known of this?"

"Not a word! Could one credit such treason! Ah, the coward! the infamous! Sir de Beauvoir had, nevertheless, departed for London that day," one said.

She looked at them with grand scorn. "It amuses you—his perfidy? You shall live to see it punished. Dr. Conyers, I owe you gratitude and reparation. Let us be friends and allies. All the hold I have on Miss Morel ceases within this hour. In return, can you break off the sale of the estate?"

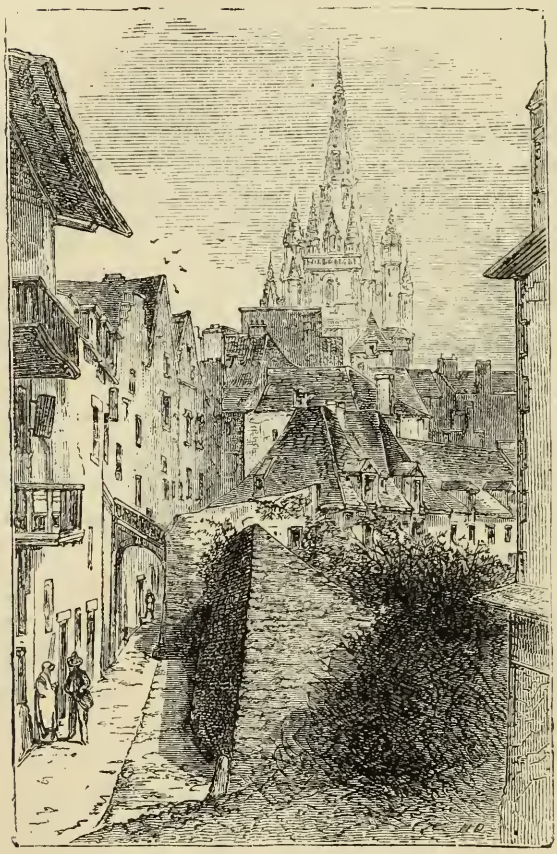
"Madame, I can do more. I can break off the marriage."

She held out her strong white hand to me, and we struck the bargain. She was in deadly earnest. Much as I hated him, for that brief instant my heart was filled with pity for Sir Ralph.

There is little more to tell. The Morels are at Castle Beauvoir still; Vera the life and soul of all the Christmas gaieties for miles round. Mrs. Morel's gratitude for my skilful treatment of her daughter is profuse enough even to satisfy Nellie; and Mr. Morel has put up a new East window in the church, and built a Cottage Hospital as thankofferings. I have never heard what became of Sir Ralph, but the golden girl from Chicago is to marry her Lord Harry at Easter. Gwen Williams declares it was all that pinch of blessed salt—yes, indeed!

# THE BRETONS AT HOME.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "Letters from Majorca," etc. etc.



WE found Quimper a strange mixture of new and old. Once upon a time it must have been very charming and interesting, full of gables and ancient outlines. The rivers, unconfined by stone embankments, ran their courses to the sea in a far more sylvan manner than they do now. Fair faces and bright eyes looked out upon the flowing waters from latticed panes, which have given place to too much that is modern and unromantic. In those days, a lover serenading his mistress beneath the moonbeams would have been a fitting accompaniment to all this charm of Mediæval architecture; as much so as a Spanish troubadour warbling love-songs beneath the lovely balconies of Seville; or an Italian twanging his guitar to his mistress reclining on the cushions of his gondola, whilst gliding over the moonlit waters, past palaces and temples, in the rapture of Love's young dream. But for Quimper the romantic age has passed. Not that for the Bretons it ever existed. One could no more imagine a Breton of these or other days writing sonnets to his mistress's eyebrows, or recalling her from dreamland by the fervour of his love songs, than we could imagine such proceeding on the part of a sturdy Yorkshireman or prosy inhabitant of Cornwall.

But there is still something that is very beautiful and interesting about Quimper. The towns where the hand of the modern barbarian has not become visible are few and far between. You must visit Vitré, Nuremberg, Dantzic, and a few such places, separated from each other by long distances, to lose yourself completely in

ıe past; to go back to the days and customs that are no more; to ıoroughly realise the Middle Ages and the race that then ruled the ʏorld. They were stronger then than we are to-day. We may have ained in the refinements of life, which have become necessary to xistence, but these, when all is said and done, are enervating. It ıay be that we are greater in science, have reached a higher develop- ıent; by-and-by shall be as gods, drawing the lightning from the kies and reading the mysteries of the stars; but those men and ʏomen of the Middle Ages must have possessed a mental and moral ıigour which we of to-day know very little about. To them the ɒuilding of a pyramid would have been an easy matter, had they ʏished to imitate the Egyptians. There was a self-reliance about hem, firm and immovable, and it was a great inheritance.

Quimper of to-day has passed away from all this. Its state of ransition is over. What the town is now, it may well be a hundred ʏears hence. Yet hardly so; for, as I have said, it still possesses :xquisite nooks and corners; some in full evidence, others only to be liscovered by seeking: spots too beautiful to last for ever. Age and lecay will overtake them; the hand of man will bring them to the ground; new buildings, hideous and imposing, will rise up and lestroy the last remnant of romance, the last vestige of what we hink must have been a dream existence.

When we left the cathedral and the curious old Suisse, and found ɒurselves under the grey morning skies, we had the world before us: he little world of Quimper. In the corner of the square we espied ın old inn, very tumbling-down and picturesque, and we made for it. The courtyard was quaint and curious. Country carts of strange forms reposed under sheds that were delightfully dilapidated. Every- hing wore a beautifully Mediæval look. The back of the inn was ıs ancient as the front—and very much more dirty; but that only ıdded to its antiquity. The windows were out of the perpendicular; he whole building looked as if a good push would bring it to the ground. In the distance uprose the houses facing the quay, con- spicuous amongst them the back windows of our hotel. Between was the sea of grey roofs and gabled outlines, and small gardens, and creepers that twined about and looked very fresh and fair and green. To the left the tall spires of the cathedral pointed upwards, like lace- work against the grey sky. It was a scene full of colouring and beauty.

The interior of the inn was worthy of the exterior. The rooms were low and ancient, the passages numerous and gloomy; there were all sorts of unexpected, out-of-the-way nooks and corners. But the virtue of cleanliness was not conspicuous: Catherine was right: cleanliness is not an article in the creed of the people of Quimper. They spare the water, that is yet so abundant.

Mine hosts of the inn were very civil, and seemed to take an interest in showing us over the place. They were a curious couple,

capacious and good-humoured. He in time promised to develop into a second Daniel Lambert. His better half, in everything but size, spoke French with a decidedly Quimper patois, and wore a Brittany cap, which was very becoming. For she must once have been pretty, and still possessed the generous comeliness of middle age, which has a distinct charm of its own. Every season has its beauty.

"The quality do not descend here," she said; "but I think they would do so if they knew how comfortable we could make them. We have an excellent cuisine; and now and then, when I am my own chef," straightening herself until her head-dress seemed to touch the low oak ceiling, "it is perfection."

"Whilst our wines cannot be equalled," chimed in the landlord, whose dimensions certainly bore witness to Madame's amiability and powers as an artist in the gastronomic world. "But like many great people, we are not appreciated at our full value, and so we for the most part only do le petit commerce."

"But of that as much as we like," said Madame. "And after all, it pays well. We are quite contented. Having no children we are not anxious to grow rich."

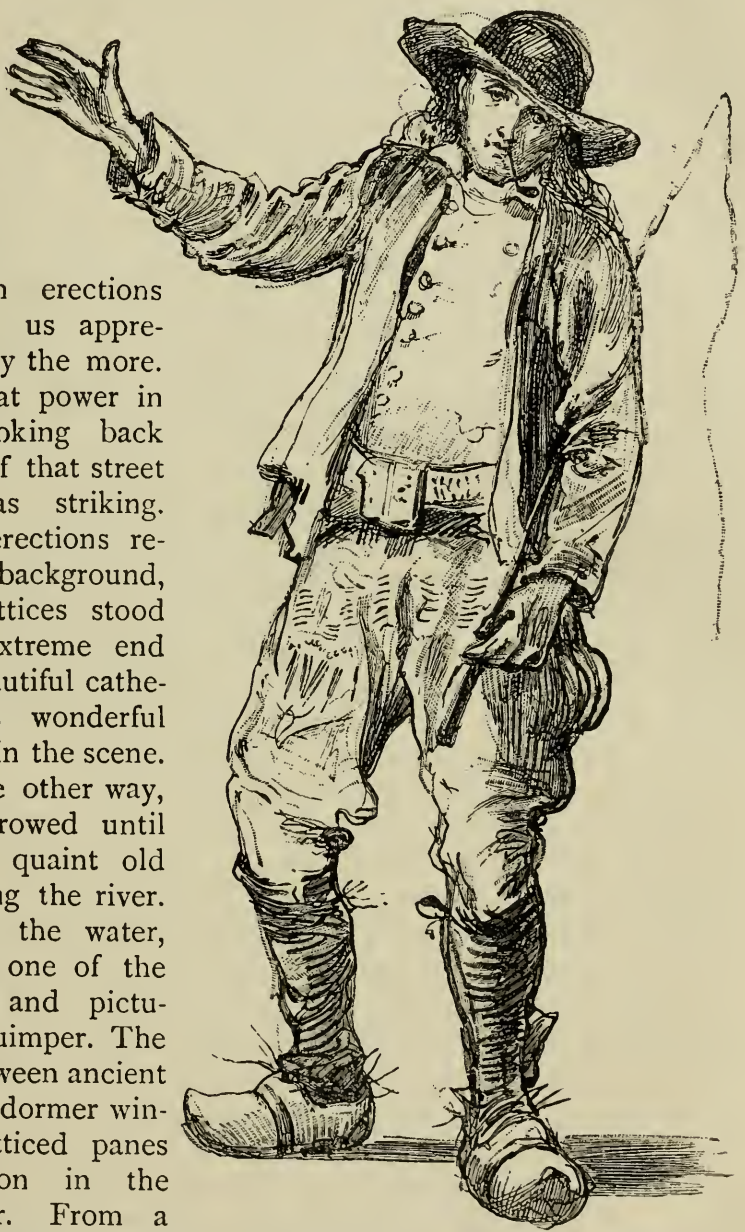
They certainly might have sat as models of Serenity, or earned the Flitch of Bacon, had Brittany possessed the custom. But its necessity has never arisen. With this phlegmatic and worthy race matrimonial troubles are the exception. Whatever the course of true love, their married lives run smoothly enough. Not altogether because the men are angels (Catherine would have a word to say to that), but because the women are forbearing, with great powers of endurance, and accept indiscretions on the part of their lords as matters to be taken for granted. It is the wiser course, and receives its reward when the end comes; often long before the end.

We left the old inn and its worthy couple, and wandered away into the town. The principal street opposite the cathedral still possessed some ancient and gabled houses. But a mania for restoration, painting and decoration has taken possession of the people, who are guilty of sins both of omission and commission. Their interiors are too often neglected; whilst latticed windows and gables that once charmed have been ruined by a wicked expenditure of paint and fancy work. The result is as displeasing as the paint and powder with which an ancient beauty tries to cheat the world into the belief that her long-lost youth is still there.

In Quimper this new face to an old building was a constant source of irritation; and so it came to pass that the town was far more interesting by night than by day. Modern and aggressive houses, with square windows and straight lines supported on either side a house dating back to Mediæval times; days that had gazed upon the world when the world was young, and men and women went about in broad hats and bell-like sleeves and skirts, and

Queen Elizabeth ruffs. Houses that had seen changes of dynasty, empires rise and fall, martyrs going to execution, and witches with the evil eye burnt at the stake, or tied up in a sack and plunged into the river. If the witch sank, poor thing, it was the judgment of Heaven, and if she floated she was clearly a sorceress.

These gabled outlines and latticed pane between unsightly modern erections perhaps made us appreciate them only the more. There is a great power in contrast. Looking back from the end of that street the effect was striking. The modern erections retired into the background, gables and lattices stood out; at the extreme end uprose the beautiful cathedral with its wonderful spires, closing in the scene.



A Breton Waggoner.

Turning the other way, the street narrowed until we reached a quaint old bridge spanning the river. Looking down the water, the view was one of the most striking and picturesque in all Quimper. The stream ran between ancient houses whose dormer windows and latticed panes found reflection in the running water. From a house on the left uprose an exquisite round turret, that might have been sixteenth century, and might have been earlier, it was difficult to say without a close examination of the masonry; an early Gothic turret with a suspicion of renaissance about the corbel. This, projecting beyond the walls, also found its deep reflection in the clear waters of the Steir. It once formed part of the ancient walls of Quimper, of which few traces are now left.

Passing down this street—the Rue de Kéréon—on the right, at the end of a narrow thoroughfare, you come to the market-place: on market days a very interesting and animated scene. I think it impressed us more than anything else in the old town. The peasantry were here in full force and in great variety of costume. Some of the Brittany caps and bodices were wonders of construction and marvels of whiteness. Here at least the women took some pride in their dress and personal appearance, and exercised some taste; and so far were the most civilized peasantry we had yet seen. Many of the women selling butter and poultry were no doubt well-to-do farmers' wives, and we were not surprised at their superior appearance both in the matter of dress and jewellery: those thick gold chains and earrings, of which the French of this class are so universally proud.

The ladies of the town, marketing in the ordinary cloaks and bonnets one sees all over the world, were much less interesting objects than the maids who followed their mistresses with well-filled baskets of provisions. It was difficult to move amidst the crowd. Much of the bargaining that went on was in the Breton tongue, which did not seem to lend itself to more speedy and amicable arrangement than any other tongue. The bargaining was as hard and prolonged as it usually is in these Continental market-places; the voices were as harsh and unmusical. But the scene is always a lively one, no matter what the place, and the placid contentment with which a market-woman pockets her diminished price proves that the system is the result of habit rather than avarice. Not everywhere, however, is it enlivened by picturesque costumes.

One morning we went in the market-place, and were surprised at an unusual commotion. There seemed an air of expectation and excitement in the faces of the people. More men than usual were lounging and strolling about, and the centre of the building had been cleared. Three musicians sat on inverted tubs, tuning up a fiddle, a bagpipe, or *biniou*, as they call it, and a flute. The sound was anything but musical, and nothing but a desire to gratify our curiosity prevented us from departing with a quick march. H. C., who, whatever his virtues, does not know God Save the Queen from the Hailstone Chorus, rather admired the combination of instruments and the frightful discord. He declared it to be nothing to the discords of Wagner: that wonderful man whose music was in reality all harmony, until his judgment went astray, and he composed operas that could only come into favour if man's age were to be seven hundred years instead of seventy.

We inquired as to the cause of all this quiet excitement, and found that it was nothing less than a wedding. The happy pair, after being married in church, would come to the market-place with the bridal party, and there, received by friends and acquaintances, would dance themselves into a state of heat and distraction as an introduction to the wedding-dinner that quickly followed.

We had not long to wait. Suddenly the musicians—the piper was blind—struck up a melancholy and monotonous strain, which was no doubt a sort of Breton Wedding March—for the Bretons are sad even in their joyous matters. It was a performance that should have assisted at a man's execution, for he would have rejoiced that life was almost over. We felt inclined to rush down to the Steir, whose waters flowed so near at hand, and plunge beneath them for ever.

In a few minutes the bridal party arrived, arrayed in costume, the happy pair wearing rather more finery than the rest. All were picturesque; for the most part well-made and comely; superior to the ordinary specimen of Breton peasant. The bride and bridegroom were not at all troubled by undue bashfulness. This public exhibition in the market-place is quite a part of the marriage ceremony. They have grown familiar with the idea from childhood upwards by assisting at the weddings of their friends. The Breton temperament, moreover, is not sensitive and highly strung, and the flush of anger is more often seen than the blush of modesty. Truth to say the latter is seldom needed; not often is their modesty shocked; both men and women are well conducted, and modesty can afford to slumber.

It was an interesting sight, this wedding festival; very much so to us, who had never seen anything of the sort. Their ways and manners were curious. They evidently found it impossible to put off a certain apathy of temperament; even in dancing, their movements were sluggish and deliberate. They never grew wild and excited and noisy; there was no laughter and shouting; it needed the inspiring influence of dinner and strong waters to stir up whatever of noisy element reposed within them.

A large ring was formed, and the newly-married couple began the performance by dancing alone, whilst the three musicians on the tubs gradually raised their discord to a wild shriek. The dance was slow and not at all graceful; perhaps the Breton peasant could not be graceful under any circumstances. Sturdy limbs, large hands and feet, a general heaviness of outline are not conducive to that "harmony of movement" which is one of the charms of life.

When the bride and bridegroom had slowly and solemnly swayed and pirouetted once or twice round the ring, another couple entered; and, without ceasing their movement, the bride and groom separated; he went on with the new lady and she with the new gentleman. So it continued until about twenty couples were whirling about like dancing dervishes. The only people who seemed to go really mad with excitement were the musicians, and their instruments performed perfect feats of raving. All the air was full of discord. We wished that the tubs would give way and swallow up all the offending element.

The tubs refused to do anything of the sort, but time came to the rescue. Tout vient à qui sait attendre. At a given signal a solemn silence suddenly fell upon all. The dancing ceased, so did the

music. A procession was formed. The musicians headed the party; the bride and bridegroom came next; the rest paired off: and the music recommenced. Thus in a long line they passed through the streets of Quimper to the inn where the wedding dinner had been provided.

Here presently we saw them all assembled in an upper room, feasting with an abundance of good cheer, and evidently very happy. Wine was circulating round the table, beer frothed in many glasses, and something stronger would no doubt be presently forthcoming.

It was a long, low room, with wide windows and small latticed panes: an old room, without carving or adornment, but well suited to the ceremony. There were two long tables and both were filled with guests. The bride headed one table, and the bridegroom sat at her right hand; thus very prettily giving honour to the weaker vessel. The bridegroom's father headed the other table, and his wife sat at his right hand. They had had their youth and their day, and we must suppose that the experience of married life had led the husband to find safety in consigning the wife to the secondary position. The lady looked quite satisfied with her lot. All round the table the stolid Breton expression had relaxed, and fun and laughter were gradually gaining the upper hand. This would go on for some hours. The costumes added greatly to the scene.

The bridegroom caught sight of us, and in no way disconcerted or offended at our intrusion—we had made it as unobtrusive as possible—he rose up with a flushed and laughing face, and, tumbler of wine raised above his head, drank to our health—thus reversing the right order of things. We duly responded, wished them happiness and length of days, and departed.

After this manner most of the weddings take place in Quimper. Those a little higher in life do not assemble in the market and dance in public; but music and feasting, though more privately indulged in, are not absent from the day's ceremonies. In Landerneau, as we have seen, music was once a very public affair, and the widows in their second marriage had, no doubt, more of it than they cared for.

There must have been something infectious in the air that day: for not two hours after we had assisted at this dance in the market-place, H. C. himself received his first offer of marriage. Again it was reversing the order of things, for it was not leap year, but I can only record what happened.

It occurred as follows:

Very near to the market-place we had discovered an amiable photographer—Madame de Kermadec—who had undertaken to develop our plates for us. In the course of conversation she discovered H. C.'s weakness for curiosities and old china. She was herself a lover of the antique, in everything excepting human nature. This immediately established a sort of freemasonry between them,

and they became excited and enthusiastic over an old and cracked oriental dragon, that very rudely showed its tongue, and had eyes

BRITTANY PEASANT.

that seemed ready to drop out of its head. This, H. C. declared, constituted its chief beauty.

"But," said Madame presently, "if Monsieur would like to see a

real collection, he should call upon Mdlle. Ponpon over the way, the marchande de chaussures. She is very charming and amiable, full of sentiment, and would be delighted to show you her treasures."

I felt inclined to remonstrate, but it was only that morning that I had put his umbrella up the chimney; he had soon missed it, and being disconsolate at his loss, I felt that some compensation was due to him. I therefore followed H. C. and the amiable but troublesome photographer with the resigned air of a martyr. I knew that I was in for a mauvais quart d'heure, but little dreamed of the delicate negotiation that I should have to carry out. Tact, after all, is a wonderful thing; and nothing but extreme tact averted terrible consequences.

Madame de Kermadec tripped across the road: H. C.'s long strides beside her playing a sort of bass to the treble of her light fantastic toe. She opened the door of the magasin de chaussures, and a small bell tinkled; a small screen dividing the front from the back regions was agitated; we heard the sound of a spoonful of soup hastily swallowed, the spoon dropped into a plate, and Mademoiselle Ponpon came forward, all smiles and curtsies. She was evidently refreshing herself with a bouillon, though it was rather the hour for tea or coffee. As she only supplied boots and shoes for the gentler portion of humanity, she must have been surprised to find that her visitors were of the perfidious sex.

"Bon-jour, Mademoiselle Ponpon," said our guide, speaking very rapidly. "This gentleman," indicating H. C., "is a passionate admirer of antiquities. I said I was quite sure you would be delighted to show him your collection."

Mademoiselle bowed. "She had never been so honoured. It would delight her to show her few biblots to ces messieurs. But they would have to take the trouble to mount to the second floor."

Madame declared she must run back to her shop. As she prepared to depart, I heard her whisper to the little marchande de chaussures, indicating H. C.:

"Magnificent eyes, ma chère! All soul. You who are full of sentiment will appreciate their expression." Then she made us a little bow and tripped back to her own domicile, where she was colouring photographs.

Mademoiselle led the way up a narrow, winding staircase to the second floor, threw open the door of her two salons, bade us welcome, asked us to be seated, and did the honours of her little collection. It was extremely good as far as it went. She had a buffet and dressoir of old carved woodwork that was genuine sixteenth century. Her walls were decorated with some rare plates of majolica ware, real old Quimper, Oriental and Sèvres. But what she was most proud of was a chair or half-throne, magnificently sculptured, and which took up quite a third of one of the small rooms.

"That chair has a history," said Mademoiselle, sitting down with

a sigh and crossing her hands. "I was not born to my present humble position. I was christened Amatalide Marie Désiré de Belleville Ponpon. My mother was a de Belleville; her father was the Marquis de Belleville. In marrying my father she made a mésalliance. He was only a Ponpon, but he was a rich ironmaster and lived in great style. My great-grandfather was Archbishop of Paris, and that chair was the throne on which he sat when presiding at the councils. Therefore I was born rather to mate with the nobility than to become—what I am."

We murmured a few words of sympathy.

"Alas, yes, it all passed away," said Mademoiselle Ponpon with another deep sigh. "The works failed, my father died almost in embarrassment, my mother soon followed him, heartbroken. I was left with a small fortune, which five years ago was lost in the Crédit Merveilleux. I have rich and noble relations—they all turned their backs upon me. And here I am, with a little rente of one thousand francs a-year, the remnant of my fortune, and my Magasin de Chaussures."

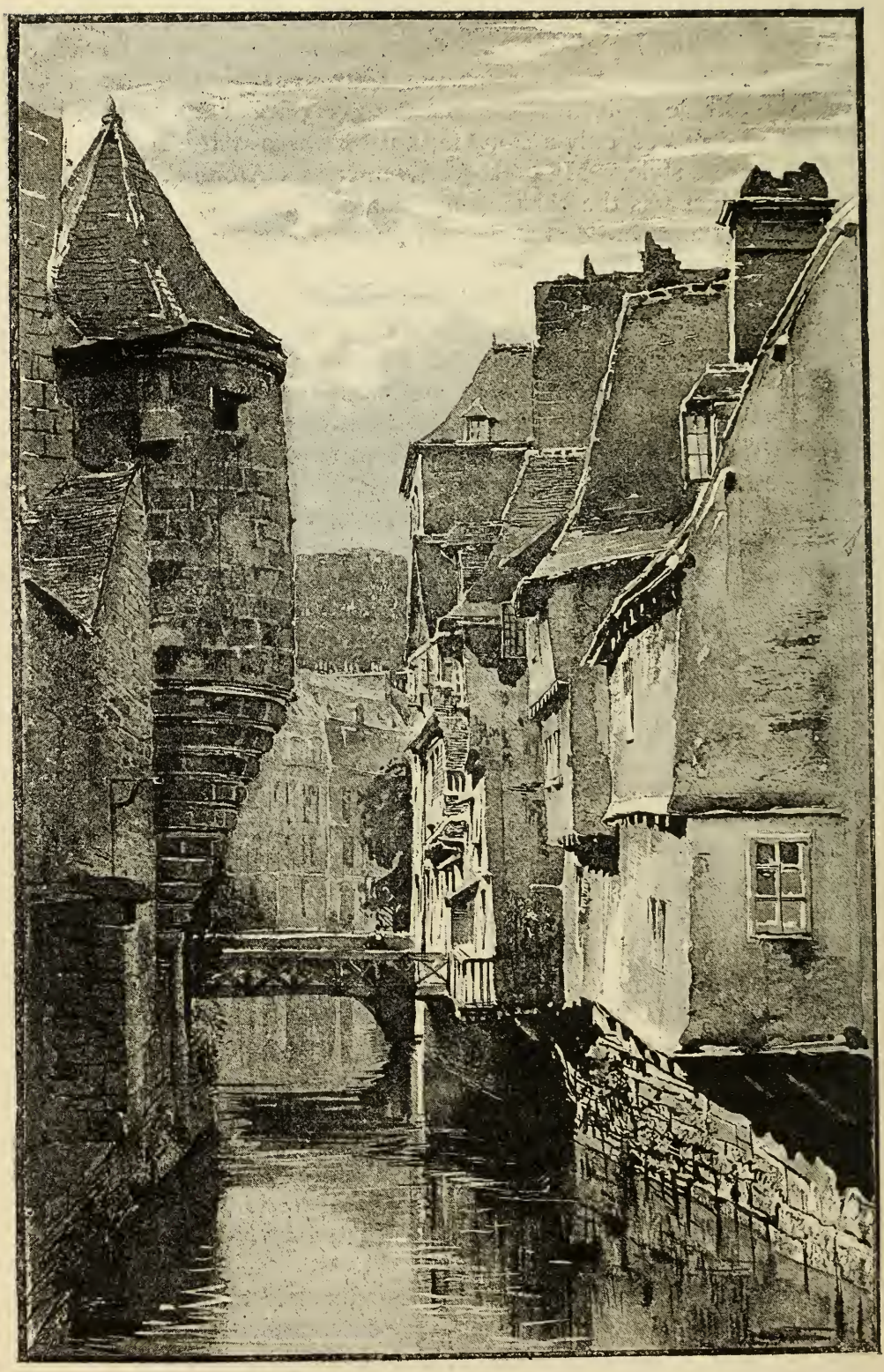
All this time Mademoiselle had been gazing steadfastly at H. C., evidently lost in admiration. As she must have been at least twenty years his senior, we were quite unprepared for what followed.

In the most delicate manner possible she intimated that she believed in love at first sight; that there was a kindred affinity in certain souls; that when these certain souls met Something whispered that they were intended for each other; that the very first moment she had gazed upon H. C. this Something told her that she had met her fate; that she had never seen such eyes before, and never expected to do so again; and that if he would espouse her, she would endow him with all her worldly goods, and would spend her days in making him happy.

It was extremely embarrassing. Mademoiselle Ponpon was evidently mad upon this subject, though she might be sane upon all others. Her troubles must have affected her brain; and no wonder, if they were as great as she had described. It was very sad altogether. She was a little, bright-eyed gentlewoman of about forty-five, with all the manner about her of the world to which she of right belonged. She must once have been very pretty, but time had faded her cheek, there were lines of care upon her brow, and her abundant hair was perfectly white. In repose the expression of her face was sad and pathetic, but it occasionally lighted up with a very bright smile.

I put on all the gravity of an ambassador, and translated her offer to H. C. with all dignity. Being very susceptible, he was evidently flattered, and blushed in what Mademoiselle must have thought a very becoming manner.

"She is certainly very charming and ladylike," he said, clearing his throat nervously, and fidgeting uneasily in his chair. "I could



QUIMPER.

write a poem about her. But it has come upon me unexpectedly; I feel rather bewildered. And then, is there not a clause in the Prayer-Book which forbids a man to marry his grandmother?"

"I believe so," I replied; "though I don't know much about the matter. But one feels that a man ought not to marry his grandmother. And what would Lady Maria say?"

"I am afraid she wouldn't approve. Mademoiselle is very nice and charming in herself, but—her surroundings! No; I must decline the honour."

"But what am I to reply?"

"Tell her that I am very flattered; deeply sensible of the honour; think her very charming; but cannot accept her."

"What excuse can I make, to best spare her feelings?"

"Say that I am an English monk, vowed to celibacy; that I am in Brittany for change of air and the study of ecclesiastical architecture. Add, if you like, that I had an early disappointment, and retired to the cloister with shattered health and a broken heart."

All of which I duly translated.

Mademoiselle heaved a deep sigh. She did not seem in the least put out, or inclined to commit suicide.

"It is always thus," she replied, "and for the tenth time I have to play Héloïse to someone else's Abelard. I think that I also shall end by taking the veil. But if Monsieur will not accept my offer of marriage, at least he will do me the honour of taking some black coffee. It was ready, even when we came up."

And giving directions to a maiden who appeared at her summons, the latter presently returned with three cups of such exquisite quality that H. C. almost regretted his hasty refusal. Mademoiselle seated herself with dignity upon the throne of her great-grandfather the Archbishop, and without doubt made a very interesting picture. Presently, the coffee duly taken, appreciated and praised, Mademoiselle escorted us down the narrow staircase and dismissed us, just as she had received us, with smiles and curtsies. It seemed evident, not only that she was not heart-broken, but that she had forgotten all about her offer of marriage.

We went back, rather perplexed, to Madame de Kermadec.

"Did she offer you marriage?" laughed Madame. "Pauvre chère Mademoiselle Ponpon! Do not be distressed. She is not heartbroken. It is the one subject on which her troubles have turned her brain. I was wicked enough to whisper something about Monsieur's eyes to her, and I knew what would follow. I assure you that the little episode will make her quite happy for a month to come. She will declare, and she will think, that it was you who made the offer to her, and that she had the honour of refusing you."

The afternoon was waning as we went back to the hotel by way of the Steir. We had very little sunshine during our stay at Quimper, but this evening the clouds had broken and the rays fell and flashed

upon the water. There was nothing like the scene in all the town; nothing so picturesque and old-world, and complete. The dormer windows in the high roofs caught the sun's reflection and seemed on fire. A woman wearing a Breton cap thrust forth her head from a small window in the round tower, and appeared much amused whilst H. C. took her with the small camera. The water rippled and lapped against the foundations of the houses. In the distance more houses closed the scene, backed by the high cliffs that shut in the old town, and make it oppressive and hot and enervating. We agreed with Catherine: to live in Quimper would mean a slow death. And the hotels do nothing to encourage one. They are all uncomfortable, more or less badly managed; crowded with commercial travellers, who care for an abundant bill of fare at dinner-time, but upon whom anything in the way of refinement would be lost.

"I shall be thankful to leave Quimper," I remarked to H. C.; "I am like Catherine—I cannot breathe here. It is overpowering. Everything grates upon you. It is all infinitely more uncivilized than a humble village inn."

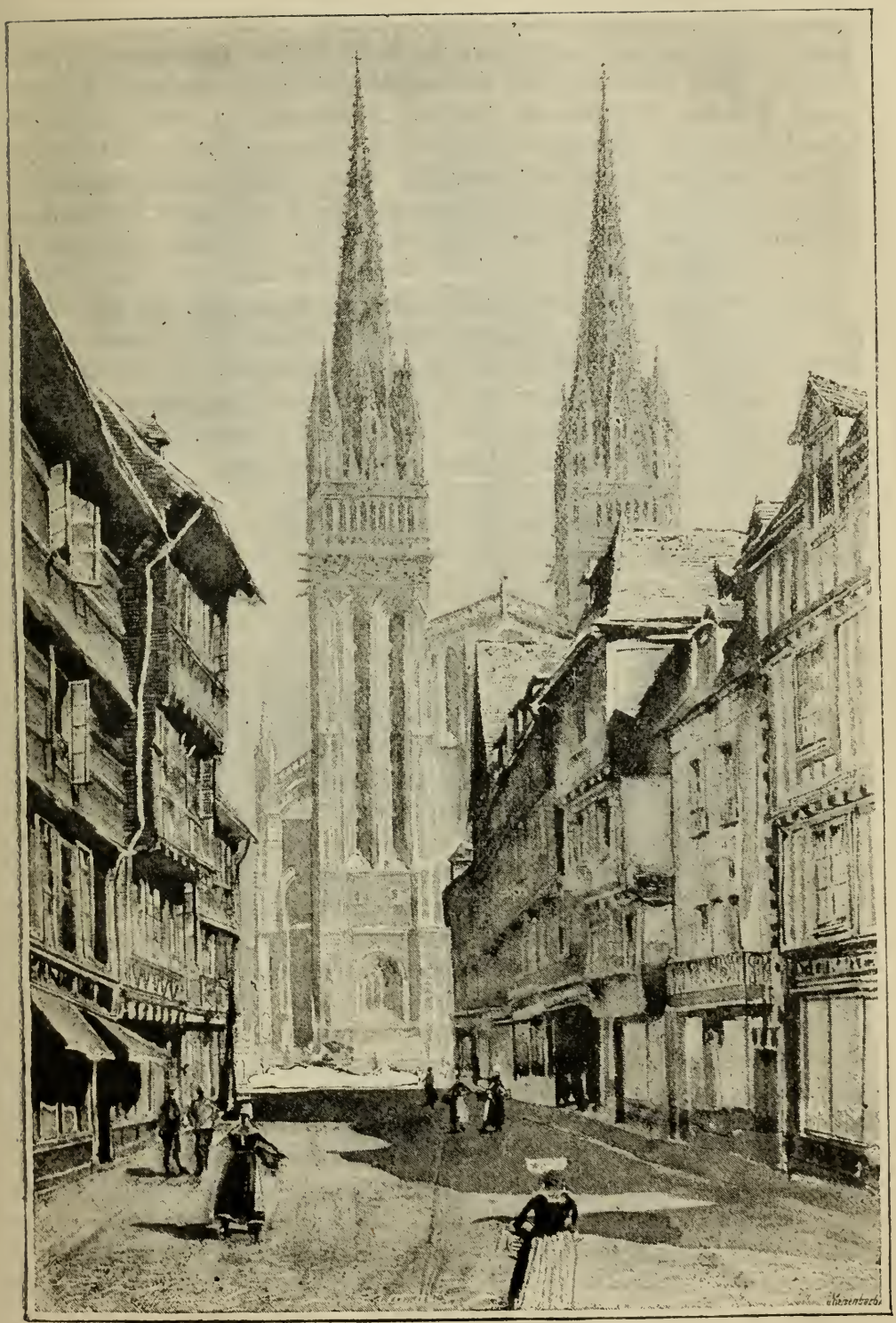
"I don't know," returned H. C., who, for a poet and the nephew of Lady Maria, can make himself singularly happy and comfortable in the midst of the most disturbing elements—"I don't know. I like Quimper. It fetches me. The peasantry are the most interesting we have seen. Nowhere else have we found any costume. I should like to spend a month here."

"And cultivate Mademoiselle Ponpon's society," I returned, rather hotly.

He blushed. "She is very charming," he said. "I almost think I did wrong to refuse her. A woman who can make such excellent black coffee must be a domestic treasure. And after all, her grandfather was a marquis and her great-grandfather an archbishop. But then there is that clause in the Prayer-Book about a man and his grandmother. You cannot get over that."

The next morning was dull and grey, and threatened rain. It had poured in torrents all night, and would no doubt soon begin again. But we had decided to see the environs of Quimper, and seldom changed our plans for the weather.

If we had thought little of the Morlaix carriages, we thought less of those of Quimper. They were like the hotels: wanted reconstructing and reorganising. Our landlord sent for the best the town could supply. Driver, horse and conveyance all matched, and promised a general breakdown long before we returned. The man looked as if he had come straight from the plough; seemed as stupid as he was uncouth, but proved himself very much the contrary. No sooner had he mounted his box than a new spirit appeared to enter into him. He whipped up his horse and made it fly up and down the hills, until the rickety old trap which they called a victoria seemed doomed.



QUIMPER.

The drive itself in fair and sunny weather is very picturesque. The country is undulating and well wooded. Long avenues of trees, where the branches meet overhead, lead by the river side. Here, too, the river looks sylvan and romantic. No unsightly granite banks confine the flowing waters, which reflect the spreading branches, the glinting leaves stretched lovingly over them. On either side are pastures, green and beautiful, where cattle browse peacefully, and where, in the evening, you may see the Breton men and women milking the cows and going off to the farm with their full pails in quite a procession.

Again, there are environs where the undulations become quite hills and valleys; the latter sheltered from the cold winds, crowded with fruit trees that in spring-time are a mass of blossom quite bewildering in its beauty; in autumn yielding its rich ripe fruit, whose harvests seldom fail. Here the peasants often work in costume, which has not yet died out from the heart of Finistère, and give a certain charm to the scene.

At the top of one of these hills, we espied a large house which looked very private and retired from the world.

"Depend upon it," said H. C., growing excited, "the ladies that we saw at the confessional the other evening live there. Let us go and call; we can but be refused, and we may be admitted. It would be an experience."

So we questioned the driver as to the house.

"No, sirs," he replied; "those ladies do not live there, but just the other side of Quimper. That is the lunatic asylum. It is always full. The people of Quimper are for ever going mad; not raving, but melancholy. It is the weather. It always rains in Quimper. And, as you see, the town is in a hole; at the bottom of a basin, as it were. There is no air; it is unhealthy and depressing. So a great many people go mad; some for good, some periodically. It is a nice change for them. As you see, the place is beautifully situated, and they are very happy up there."

"Do the visitors also ever go mad?" asked H. C. anxiously.

"Sometimes," answered our driver, with a humorous intonation we should never have given him credit for. "It is not at all uncommon. But now, sirs, I will take you to a singular old house; the oldest house in all Brittany, I verily believe."

As he spoke he turned out of the high road down a lane. It was more than a foot deep in mud, and there were high hedges on either side. At the end of the lane we came to a sort of farmyard, still more muddy than the lane, bordered on two sides by sheds and stables, on the third side by the house.

It was all that the driver had declared. He assured us that it was a thousand years old, and, built of stone, massive and well-preserved, rich in tone, it looked it. The house was plain, with the exception of the exquisite doorway, which was richly ornamented. The

windows had been altered, and had partly lost their antiquity. They were large and long, the one nearest the ground being closed with rickety old shutters. The mullioned stonework was still in excellent

Our Old House.

condition. The house was in two parts, as it were, one higher than the other. The windows in the lower portion had been less interfered with. The mullioned frames of thick stonework, in the form

of a cross, were still perfect. The roofs, high and slanting, were also decorated with small, quaint windows.

As the driver stopped, a woman in a Brittany cap came to the doorway, and in that rich and antique frame she made a striking picture. The house was nothing but a humble farmhouse and she was its humble mistress. A maid in clanking wooden sabots was flourishing about with a pail.

The interior of the house corresponded with the exterior. It seemed absolutely untouched. The furniture was old and carven, though rough and homely. Immense beams ran across the ceilings; the fireplaces were substantial and enormous, with stone copings. The staircases were massive and ancient, and there was a great deal of old stone carving in the nooks and turnings. In the bedrooms the bedsteads that had been used centuries ago were still in use; bedsteads that were simply huge wooden boxes curiously carved, like some of the woodwork one sees in Egypt. The only access to the interior of this great box was by a hole at the foot, through which they crawled in very uncomfortable fashion. It was so in days gone by; it is so now where the bedstead, having descended as an heir-loom from generation to generation, is still used.

Everything was untouched and in perfect preservation: everything in keeping. The rooms were large and barely furnished. One immense room was half filled with apples, and huge stone grotesques looked down upon them: a room in which the rats must have held high revelry for undisturbed generations—heirlooms of the house, like the grotesques and the old bedsteads and the massive doors.

To the people who live there it is nothing more than an old farm-house, and they seemed unable to understand our exclamations of surprise and delight. "A primrose by the river's brink, a primrose 'twas to him." So was it here. The beauties of antiquity were nothing to them. The halo that a thousand years had thrown over the house they could not discern. But it was worth while coming to Quimper, only to see this house: only to see the picture that the two women made as they stood in the doorway to be photographed: one adorned with a pail, the other with a broom. In this they took a lively interest, and begged that in due time we would send them copies.

We were charmed with our driver for showing us this wonderful old place. We had heard nothing about it; had no idea that the neighbourhood of Quimper possessed anything so interesting.

"No," he remarked; "no one ever comes here. No one thinks anything of it. But I saw that you were interested in old houses, and I don't think you will easily beat that one for age. I knew it was just what you would like."

He was quite right; and next to the cathedral of Quimper this old house would again attract us to the town.

As we returned, we paid a visit to our fellow traveller at the

palace; first dismissing our driver with a bountiful reward for the injustice we had done him in our thoughts, and for the pleasure he had given us. But there was some excuse for us—nature had not been kindly towards him; and when he drove off with his vehicle, which was as antiquated as the very house we had just visited, we should have said, had we not known better, that he was a very fitting candidate for the lunatic asylum he had pointed out to us.

Our fellow-traveller was at home, and accorded us a warm welcome. He was resting in a magnificent room that breathed out quite an ecclesiastical atmosphere: a room of the past, full of refinement and beauty and dignity. It looked on to the lovely and secluded garden attached to the Palace at Quimper.

"I have employed my leisure moments in writing a history of the Church," he presently said, when we had touched on various indifferent topics. "A history of the Church in its broad outlines, not in its minute details. I never had patience to go into details. There I think I should have made a good commander, had I been destined to the army. I hold that a good general should lay down a broad, comprehensive plan of campaign, and leave all details to his officers."

"And when will your history appear?" we asked.

"I do not know," he laughed; "perhaps never. I have written it because I love the work; for my own amusement, rather than for publication. But I was about to observe that this history is my reason for being at Quimper at the present moment. I had occasion to refer to certain rare works that happen to be in the palace library, and having a week to spare I am thus using it. It is at once work and recreation to me. Then I am quite at home here: know and am well known."

We told him of our experience in the cathedral the evening of our arrival.

"Ah!" he cried; "they are saintly women; the Marys of this world, full of good works; humbly sitting at the foot of the Cross; taking up their daily round. One of them, my cousin, renounced the world for this. She was beautiful and married young, the Comte de B——. Everything that the world held of attraction, luxury and delight was at her feet. Her husband adored her. It was a marriage of love, not of convenance. At the end of a year she was the mother of a lovely son. The happiness of the father and mother seemed complete. It was, indeed, happiness too great to last. Another six months had changed light to darkness. The Count in the height of his happiness, the flower of his youth and beauty, was thrown from his horse and lived only long enough to clasp his wife in his arms and bless her with his dying breath. In less than two months, the child followed the father, a victim to scarlet fever. Her last consolation taken from her, the mother, in spite of every opposition from her family, withdrew from the world. Here she came, and here she has

remained. 'Having suffered affliction,' she said, 'I have learnt to pity the afflicted. The remainder of my life shall be devoted to them.' She has kept her resolution, proved better than her word. These women are indeed a community of saints. But now," he broke off, "you must dine with me this evening. Nay, I will take no refusal. Your travelling dress? That as a matter of course. I am quite alone to-night. You shall tell me of England; of other lands if you know them; I will make you acquainted with Brittany. Then, on Sunday when you come to hear me preach, you will know a little more of the preacher and the people that surround you than you do now. I have bidden old André, the Suisse, keep places for you."

"So he informed us," we said. "He seems, indeed, a singular character."

"Singular and good, in spite of his mania about ghosts and shadows. He has haunted the cathedral until its silence and gloom, the stillness of night, have slightly affected his brain. But he is an interesting character, devoted to me, and I shall miss his familiar figure when his place knows him no more. At seven, then, I shall expect you," he said, as we got up to leave. "You will not fail me. I will show you some rare old volumes and manuscripts that will delight you. And when the last shades of night are falling, we will summon old André, and make him take us all through that beautiful old cathedral. We will enjoy the solemn silence, the sacred atmosphere, the wonderful aisles and arches, the witching twilight. And if the hour and the place should inspire you, the layman shall mount the pulpit and preach a sermon to the ecclesiastic. I will sit at the feet of Gamaliel."

We left him. The daylight hours wore away, and as the deep-toned cathedral bell struck the hour of seven, the smaller bell at the palace gate clanged out upon the air, the great portal immediately opened and closed upon us, and once more we found ourselves within the lovely precincts of the palace garden.

# A RISKY REVENGE.

*A True Incident.*

IT was in the year 188—. The Carnival was drawing to its close, and Turin was amusing itself in its usual way—dancing here, playgoing there; singing, shouting, supping, laughing, love-making, buying and selling everywhere; brawling and squabbling one moment, and embracing the next. More or less, the entire population seemed to be drinking freely of the draught of pleasure, knowing by experience that the approaching ashes would be dry enough; and, if you had looked with attentive eyes, you would have learned to class and qualify the different degrees of intoxication indulged in (of course I mean moral intoxication). Ten days or so yet remained for the unrestrained exercise of toe and tongue before the long and lugubrious Lent would put in her appearance—lank and lean, with forbidding face, and with besom in hand to sweep away all frivolity for a season; and of these ten days everyone seemed intent upon making the most. At the end of them, many who were able to do so would hurry off to Milan for the Carnevalone and a final draught of pleasure, blessing St. Ambrogio in their hearts for having conferred upon the sister city the privilege of a few extra hours of dissipation. It was a queer boon for a saint to bestow; but I never yet heard anybody abuse him for doing so—on the contrary, I can safely assert its having procured him quite a harvest of blessings.

But to my story.

Let us enter a drawing-room on the first floor of one of the best houses in Via della Lecca.

The apartment is large, well-proportioned, and expensively furnished, and contains certain objects that are usually consigned to another chamber: a case of pistols, a pair of foils, dumb-bells, a riding-whip or two, to say nothing of an enormous mastiff on the hearth-rug and an ape upon the high back of a carved oak chair. An entire table is given up to cigars and their relative belongings. The grand piano, in ebony and gold, is laden with the scores of operas and other music; there are books in the principal modern languages littered about, or ranged in somewhat untidy rows in the dwarf bookcases. There are pictures on the walls, fluffy rugs upon the carpet, old china on brackets, low sofas and luxuriant chairs, plants in the windows, wealth everywhere. Yet the ensemble would not please one in a hundred, for the walls and furniture are covered in dark green, the former in velvet, the latter in brocade, and the effect of the total is dismal and depressing in the extreme.

No stranger could have declared, if called upon to do so, whether

the room was that of a man or a woman. He would have been obliged to say: "If to a man, he must be a poor, effeminate creature; if to a woman, she must be a virago." George Sand, Princess Metternich, Rosa Bonheur, or Sarah Bernhardt might have indulged in a similar saloon without a word's being said on the matter; but there were neither Bonheurs nor Bernhardts, Metternichs nor Sands at Turin; so it gave rise to much small talk; and many who had never seen it described it as a kind of Bluebeard's chamber, easy enough to enter, but difficult to escape from unscathed.

And there was some slight shade of truth in the latter assertion. Good round sums had passed from the purses of the luckless to the pockets of the lucky within the shelter of those sap-green walls. But in all honesty and honour, be it understood. Stakes usually ran high, it is true, but playing was not compulsory, and all were perfectly free to risk or refrain, as best they pleased.

The Breguet clock upon the verde antico chimney-piece is chiming two as a lady visitor enters the room, and, throwing off her boa, crosses its entire breadth and ensconces herself in one of the comfortable chairs opposite the fire. She is evidently an habituée of the place, for Tom, the mastiff, gives her a sleepy welcome—a glance with motionless head and a wag with mutilated tail—after which, like Dr. Watts's sluggard, though without "turning," he peacefully "slumbers again."

The ape's reception was less amiable. He chattered and grinned from his perch, running along it from left to right and right to left, as if uncertain, from previous experience, what to expect—a cuff or a caress—and desirous of showing himself prepared for one or the other. Countess Avogadro had administered both on sundry well-remembered occasions.

She was a pretty little woman, plump and pleasing; with a good income and a keen relish for life; and, best of all, a husband who adored her to the extent of never denying her anything. She drove and danced through life to her heart's content; while he, heavy and hulking, followed in her wake as best he could.

The dark portière is jerked aside and the mistress of the house enters. With a nick of welcome to the Countess, and an exclamation of "what horrible weather!" uttered in a deep voice, she flings herself into the chair opposite her guest.

You then at once catch the reason of her surrounding herself with household gods the colour of sodden spinach. Her face is amongst the most ill-favoured ever seen. Nothing better than a skull, that has turned brown from being buried in damp earth, can give an adequate idea of it.

She is rich, a widow, childless, healthy, clever, even witty; but ugly with an ugliness that no pen can describe, and that must be seen to be understood.

Her year of mourning past, Madame Durò burst forth in an

entirely new line. She had always been a blue-stocking—now she appeared to aim at becoming a blackleg. She played, shot, hunted, fenced, boxed, smoked, and even dressed in male attire at times. It was whispered that she had challenged an officer, and would actually have fought, had he not, with a hearty laugh, declined the duel. In fact, she showed herself a perfect riddle, a second edition of Count Eon—a something, in a word, that everybody laughed at, and whose dinners everyone was glad and ready to eat.

"Well, Lulu, and what's the news?" asked Madame Durò, after she had lit a cigarette, crossed her legs comfortably, and settled herself to her liking.

"Little or nothing, that I know of. Why were you not at Countess Rinaldi's last night?"

"I couldn't go. I went to see the fencing match, and brought a tribe here to supper afterwards."

"Well, it was a pity you did not come. Her brother was there, you know."

"What, the diplomat? Well, I am sorry I missed him. He has travelled so much; and they say that he is very agreeable."

"As agreeable as handsome. But you have seen him yourself?"

"Yes; we met at Baroness Brizzi's, but were not introduced."

"You are sure to meet him again. I heard him say he was going to the Veglione on Tuesday."

"All right. And how is the Rinaldi?"

"Lively and spiteful as ever. I never heard such a tongue."

"Of course not. Two such would be quite too much for the town. And whom did she flay?"

"All her friends who were absent."

"Me amongst the number, then?"

"Of course. But not very severely."

"What did she say?"

"Oh, only that you were not half so clever and witty as you wished to appear."

"Spiteful cat! I'll pay her out, though. I believe she carries her hump full of malice, ready to produce on occasion."

"I daresay she does. If you had heard her go on about Letizia Gamba!"

"And why? What has the poor girl done to her?"

"Nothing—only people say she would be a good match for her brother."

"So she would. And then?"

"The Countess doesn't want him to marry anybody; for if she can keep him single, his money will go to her children."

"Yes; I see. Had you any music?"

"A little. The Countess sang."

"That's all she can do, sing and slander. Her voice is certainly splendid. Were she not hump-backed, she could go on the stage to-morrow."

"Apropos. What have you decided upon for Tuesday night?"

"A domino, I think."

"So have I. One can enjoy oneself so much more. And I am going to dance—oh, for hours."

"Miles, you mean."

"Yes, if you like. And so is Avogadro. And we are going to have such a galop together. Big as he is, there isn't a man in Turin can dance like him."

A vision of a gambolling elephant rose to Madame Durò's mental eye. But she said nothing. She knew how infatuated—the word is the world's, not mine—her friend was with her husband, and she laughed at her for being so, even while confessing to herself that it must be all very pleasant.

The image of another man rose and drove out the remembrance of the Count's uncouth attractions—that of Countess Rinaldi's brother. Her discoloured face flushed. It might have been the fire; it might also have been anger at the Countess having tried to diminish her merit in the eyes of the only man in all Turin whom she cared to please, and whom she had secretly determined to try and conquer. It was a bold ambition, but Madame Durò was also a bold woman, and whatever might have been the cause of that flush, she was forced to turn her attention to other things; for visitors made their appearance, and soon a Babel of tongues usurped the somewhat oppressive quietude of that much-maligned and dismal drawing-room.

The Veglione at the Scribe Theatre was at its height. In the boxes were seated all the fashion and elegance of the town; in the pit, which had been boarded over level with the stage, a turbulent crowd whirled and waltzed, undulated and flowed—a tide of gaiety and excitement—a very kaleidoscope of colour. A garden of tulips suddenly endowed with life and sentiment; motion mingled with something very like a touch of madness.

Banners and draperies hung round the house; they quivered in the heated air upon which a hundred odours floated. A flood of light from above illumined the gay scene. It fell full upon tinsel and tawdriness; upon velvet and silk; upon paste diamonds and dominos; upon kings and queens, courtiers and pages; sailors and shepherds; sweeps and harlequins; cooks and clowns; upon every sort of garment and personage one could desire or devise—the uniform of the soldier and the robe of the priest excepted.

In one of the Court boxes sat a party of ladies and gentlemen—mere spectators, and clad in ordinary evening dress. Countess Rinaldi was its hostess for the night, and the visits paid her had already been numberless. Society runs after those it fears quite as much as after those it loves. Perhaps even more.

"There is your brother, at last," said a lady to the Countess; "standing just under No. 5."

The Countess adjusted her glasses; then said:

"Yes, it is Alfonso. He told us he should be late. I suppose he'll honour me with a visit when he gets tired of being elbowed by the mob yonder. I cannot—— Ah, bon soir, Monsieur le Baron; je suis charmée de vous voir," pursued Madame Rinaldi, breaking suddenly off and gliding into French to welcome the attaché who just entered the box, and who spoke neither Italian nor Piedmontese.

"Why are you so late?"

"I come from Madame de Castellengo's. She has been good enough to sing to me. What a voice is hers!"

"Not more beautiful than that of the Comtesse Rinaldi," put in an elderly gentleman who was fearfully afraid of the lady's tongue and never let slip an occasion of propitiating it.

"Oui, c'est bien vrai," rejoined Madame Durò, rising to retire. "Et puis, où trouverez vous un dos (do) comme celui de la Comtesse! Il est unique, tout à fait unique."

Then, with a would-be-innocent smile and a nod of adieu, she slipped out of the box, leaving the Countess mute with rage and purple with repression. Madame Durò's Parthian shaft was clever as it was cruel: to notice would be to acknowledge; so her ladyship was forced to suffer in impotent silence and note with inward ire that the double entendre had been fully appreciated by her guests of the moment.

Meanwhile, Madame Durò, instead of descending to her loge, which was on the first tier and which was filled with friends, sped along the deserted corridor, up a flight of stairs, and then on to a remote upper box which she had taken the precaution secretly to secure. Her heart was light as her step—her wicked sally had been successful; and, till then, all her little plans had prospered. She reached the little dingy den without having met more than a few stragglers, none of whom had recognised her; she entered it a dark domino, to emerge from it, a few minutes later, as charming a vivandière as any could wish to see. This implies that she was closely masked.

It was a cruel trick of Fate to have united so plain a face to so faultless a figure. Her hands and feet were perfect, and the dress she had chosen displayed every curve of her form to the best advantage.

Throwing aside the brusque air and man-like motion she generally displayed as a sort of token of defiance to the world, and a challenge to criticism, she tripped lightly down the stairs and, a few minutes later, entered the pit.

The revel was at its height, and the whole scene a fair suggestion of Pandemonium. An unceasing roar; an endless rush; a close atmosphere, a light rendered lurid by the dust floating overhead; such was what she encountered; and it was some little time before

she could discover and approach the person she had come to seek. She found him at last, however, and managed, after a little manœuvring, to secure a position in which he could not fail to notice her.

The Marquis Garofalo was not a bit like his hump-backed sister, Countess Rinaldi. He was tall and well built, with a thoughtful face and somewhat dreamy eyes—a man such as any woman might be eager to win, and any wife proud to wear.

It was not very long before he managed to make his way to where the vivandière was standing, and addressed her with one of the stereotyped phrases in use on similar occasions. She replied in a voice that was evidently disguised but, at the same time, pleasing. Quite different to the inane, parroty scream so common to masked balls; as also were her words to the imbecile rubbish generally uttered thereat. The Marquis at once felt that he had come across no common personage, and a very short study of her beautifully-formed hands and fairy feet confirmed him in his conviction.

A conversation ensued in which the lady contrived to exhibit, and all without any manifest intention of display, a wit tempered by delicacy, a knowledge of the world and its ways, and a sound judgment, such as aroused no slight curiosity and admiration in her companion.

They made a tour of the scene, arm-in-arm. The vivandière seemed to know everybody and to be recognised by none.

"Who can she be?" thought the Marquis. "She evidently belongs to Turin; yet she is quite unlike anyone I ever met before."

Finally they sat down upon a bench and passed in review the occupants of the boxes. His admiration and wonder increased at every sally. Apropos of one she quoted "Hamlet" in the original; apropos of another "Les Précieuses Ridicules"; Goethe of a third. She seemed to speak all languages equally well, and not only to have read much, but also to have profited by and retained what she had read. The Marquis, a somewhat serious man in the main, was out of himself at last with pleasure and surprise.

One thing alone worried and vexed him: her decided refusal to unmask. No entreaty could move her.

"Not even for a moment?" he pleaded.

"Not even for a moment. At some future time—but I cannot tell either when or where—you shall see my face, and——"

"It cannot fail to be a charming one. With such a figure, such a mind! Ah, you cannot be other than beautiful."

"Don't be too sure."

"Now you are jesting. But have pity; tell me, at least, where we are to meet."

"There is still a Veglione at the Regio, and two or three private masked balls—we shall meet at one or the other."

"But at which?"

"Who knows?"

"You promise me, at least?"

"I promise you."

"And you will unmask?"

"Yes."

"And by what token am I to recognise you?"

The vivandière broke into a hearty laugh. Then:

"There! Convicted by your own words of false compliments. If I am so superior in form to the rest of my sex, as you have been trying for the last half hour to persuade me, how can you have any difficulty in recognizing me? Ah, Marquis, I have caught you at last!"

"Not at all. For Venus herself could pass unnoticed under a domino, and if you were to wear one ——"

"Just what I intend to. Well, never mind, I will make myself known to you."

"And till then?"

"You will eat and drink and sleep as usual, I suppose."

"Well; I am not very sure of that."

"Shall you be thinking too much of Letizia Gamba?"

"Of Letizia Gamba? No, indeed. She is a good, nice girl; but I require something more than that."

"Money, perhaps. But Letizia has that."

"I don't care a straw for money—I have plenty of my own."

"Beauty then?"

Her voice trembled slightly as she put the question. The Marquis hesitated. Then, after a moment's pause: "Well, no man is indifferent to beauty, whatever he may say to the contrary. But I will admit that there are other possessions which, in a wife, fully make up for the want of beauty. A man of sense chooses his better half for her moral qualities. He who chooses his for her face alone must be a fool."

An increasing uproar and a terrific swaying to and fro of the crowd put a stop to all further conversation. The final, frantic gallopade had begun. They rose from their bench.

Like a leaf by the surge, the vivandière was swept from his side, and the Marquis found himself alone.

The Marquis Garofalo passed a long and most wearisome night at a private masked ball in the hope of meeting the vivandière who, at the Scribe, had made such an impression upon him. But all in vain. No vivandière was there; nor anyone, indeed, whom he could identify with the lady of his longing.

He went home, if not in despair, at least in a most melancholy mood. But there a consolation, as supreme as unexpected, awaited him. A letter of over three pages, smelling faintly of attar of roses, charmingly expressed, and written in a bold, clear hand that was rather masculine than otherwise in its character. It was signed "Vivandière."

Weariness and vexation spread their wings and fled. He flung

himself into an arm-chair before the fire; dismissed his wondering valet, and read and re-read the welcome epistle.

It was as charming as the lady's conversation had been; witty at times, sensible ever; yet not in the least premeditated or book-like.

"She is one in a thousand!" exclaimed the Marquis, laying down the letter upon the little table beside him and lighting a cigar.

"She is one in a million!" he ejaculated, upon coming to the end of a third perusal.

Then he set to work to count the hours that must elapse before the Veglione at the Royal Theatre should take place—to which Veglione, she wrote him, she should go; adding that he would find her in Box No. 15 on the second tier.

The Marquis was in the seventh heaven, and on going to bed, slipped the letter under his pillow. His last thought before falling off to sleep was the determination to go to the box-office as soon as he had breakfasted. And so he did. But he might have saved himself the trouble, for he was unable to learn anything. The box had been taken and paid for by a servant in plain livery. Had it been the matter of a regular subscription the name would have been asked and registered—but for a single night no such formality as booking was practised.

As he came downstairs he cursed the impresario for an imbecile and the book-keeper for a buffoon.

And, having relieved himself thus rationally, he returned home to cajole time as best he might.

The Marquis's standing was such as permitted of his being unfashionable when it so pleased him; owing to which, eleven o'clock found him already in the house, looking up anxiously at No. 15.

Nothing but the closely-drawn curtains rewarded his diligence.

Well, he thought, he was on the spot, at any rate, and that was better—infinitely better—than being at home and watching the hateful hands of the clock. So he took a turn in the house, peeped into the foyer, and then returned to take another look at the —for the present—haven of his hopes.

The boxes were slowly filling, but No. 15 was as yet in statu quo.

A wild impulse of mounting to try the door assailed him; but good sense came to the rescue and he remained where he was.

Slowly the minutes dragged on. All Turin seemed to be flocking in—to the boxes above and the pit below. All, save the person whom alone he had come to meet.

He, usually so calm and dignified, was growing agitated and irritable to a degree such as to render a strong effort over himself needful to reply with equanimity to the numerous greetings he encountered.

"What the deuce is the matter with Garofalo this evening?"

asked a young officer of his companion. "He looks and speaks like a savage."

"Been losing at play, I suppose. I heard they staked high at the club last night."

"Well, I daresay it was that. I hope for his friends' sake he doesn't lose often."

And away they strolled, arm-in-arm. They were of those who looked upon the loss of Louis d'ors as the only one authorising loss of temper.

At last the happy moment arrives. The crimson silk curtains flutter faintly — they are drawn aside by a firm hand, and then, oh bliss! a lady in a dark green domino and black velvet mask appears. She gazes leisurely round the house, one faultlessly-formed hand resting upon the edge of the box; surveys the now rapidly filling pit, then seats herself somewhat in the background and out of the immediate glare of the light.

Garofalo allows her ten minutes respite, and then mounts to the assault.

"She promised she would unmask," he repeated to himself. "I shall see her at last!"

He reached the door, paused for a second, then knocked gently.

"Avanti," replied a voice that caused his heart—diplomat though he was—to bound in his bosom.

He opened the door and entered.

There sat his dream of the last few days. She extended her hand to him, and bade him take the fauteuil opposite. She was evidently glad to see him, and he fancied he divined a smile behind that hateful mask.

"She promised to take it off," he thought again, "and then——"

"You received my letter, I see."

"Yes—and allow me to thank you a thousand times for it. You cannot guess what a relief it was. I had made sure of meeting you at the Duchess's."

"And you did not think me very bold?"

"Bold? Why should I? On the contrary, I thought you very kind."

"You deem boldness and kindness incompatible then?"

"Not always. Generally speaking, yes."

"Well, exceptionally, then. Let us look for a case. That of the surgeon, for instance, who cuts in order to cure?"

"Yes. But I have always pitied the surgeon too—for you may be sure he also suffers at the pain he inflicts."

The lady sighed slightly. Then added: "And yet he has the courage to inflict it."

"Do you not admire him?"

"I do more—I envy him."

"You envy him? And why?"

"I am going to play his part."

"His part? When? How?"

"To-night. Before you leave this box."

"Then the patient must be——"

"Il Mauchese Alfonso Garofalo."

"I accept—accept willingly. Nothing you can do, one thing excepted, can torture me; and I am here to-night to conjure you not to do it."

"And that is ——?"

"To deprive me of your presence."

The lady did not reply at once. She seemed to be trying to master some emotion or other. But whether of anger, or what, the Marquis could not discover.

"Perhaps you will not give me the chance?"

"How so? What do you mean?"

"Perhaps it is *you* who will deprive me of *your* presence."

"Impossible! I swear to you——"

"Hush. Don't swear anything. Not yet, at least. Just suppose that I was not the beauty you have seen fit to take for granted that I am—what then?"

"Had you asked me the question at our former meeting I should have hesitated to reply, perhaps. Reflection, your letter, my better self, my heart have taught me otherwise. I can answer without hesitation, and like an honest man. I am so thoroughly convinced of your other good qualities that, even if beauty is not one of your gifts, I shall, if you allow it, place myself and my fortune at your disposal."

"Marquis, Marquis, you are either very generous or very——" she hesitated.

"Silly you would say. I know the world would say so—but I did not expect the word from you."

"It was your own—not mine. Be sure that I would rather think of you as generous."

"Do so, then, and imitate the example ——"

He took one of her hands in his, and raised the other as if to remove her mask.

She drew back, but did not withdraw the hand he was holding.

"Wait a moment. I will keep my promise. I came here to do so."

He drew his chair an inch or two nearer and waited. Anxiety, suffering, hope alternately played upon his countenance.

There was a pause, and, for the first time during the interview, the lady appeared embarrassed.

"So that, however ugly I may be—your—your opinion of me would not change?"

"No, I tell you. Anyone can see and hear that you are a lady to your fingers' ends. I can affirm that you are as superior in mind to

all the rest of our great ladies as the sun is to the stars. I only wonder and regret that we have never met before. I wish to Heaven we *had* met before. No woman who was not virtuous and good could speak and write as you do. No, I repeat, that if you were as ugly as—— " he stopped to seek for a simile—then, in a quicker voice and a triumphant tone, added : "as ugly as Madame Durò herself, it would make no change in me."

The lady rose slowly, stepped into the full glare of the lamps, and then suddenly removed her mask.

Madame Durò stood before him !

Long, lugubrious Lent had at last come to an end. Frying-pans were enjoying a respite ; so were the fishes. The town reeked somewhat less of oil. Butchers were rejoicing.

So also were the birds, for they could once more sing in the budding blackthorn, beneath which the primroses clustered and the violets crept forth, called back to light and life by the smiles of the sky and the warmth of the sun.

Our ci-devant Madame Durò, too, rejoiced ; she had had her revenge upon the world at large, and upon Countess Rinaldi in particular. For she had married the Marquis—or, I suppose I should say, the Marquis had married her. It is more polite, but, in compensation, less correct. The Archbishop himself performed the ceremony in his private chapel, in presence of a select few only. Madame Avogadro and her burly husband were among the number. Countess Rinaldi had utterly declined to be present. No one was known to mourn over her decision.

And in the actual Marchioness Garofalo you would with difficulty recognise the Madame Durò of former days. She no longer flings the gauntlet into the face of the world by aping the man and studying how best to unsex herself. Despite all her endeavours, she had remained a woman at heart ; and she proved it by adoring her husband and by making herself sincerely loved by him in return. She couldn't change her face, of course—and I am not very sure that the Marquis would have wished her to do so, even had it been possible. Love had changed all the rest and that was quite sufficient. Yes ; her revenge was a very sweet one, though she and her husband fully agreed as to its having been terribly " risky."

A. Beresford.

# LOST IN THE BUSH.

By M. Gaunt.

"I SAY, old fellow."

"Well?"

"I believe it's a case this time. I'm going to peg out."

"Nonsense, Hardy, nonsense. Cheer up, old chap. There's thunder in the air—you'll be better when the storm bursts. Here, have some tea," and Will Hammond crossed the small hut to the sick man's bed, and held a pannikin to his lips.

He pushed it away impatiently. "Tea—tea—tea; they never think of anything but tea in this part of the world; give me some whisky."

"You had the last drop last night."

Hardy turned with a sigh to the wall, and Hammond went back to the flour-barrel on which he had been sitting and his unprofitable meditations.

He had not made a success of life, that was clear. Twenty-five years old to-day—and—looking back, he saw behind him a wasted life. At Oxford—well, his career had been a short and merry one, and at nineteen his father had cast him off and turned him out into the world with twenty pounds in his pocket to manage "as best he could."

"You have disgraced your name, sir—disgraced it—never let me hear from you again."

"I was only a boy," thought the man, bitterly; "only a foolish boy; he might have given me another chance. If it hadn't been for the mater and the girls ——" But he was dead—and so was she—he would never now be able to vindicate himself with the one, nor show his gratitude to the other. How vividly it all came back to him. The cosy, richly-furnished room, and his father's stern voice; and then his mother's clinging arms and tearful kisses.

"My boy—my boy! Don't go far away; it will soon come all right." And then she had thrust into his pocket four ten-pound notes, to which Emmie, his favourite sister Emmie, had added another—all her scanty savings. How good they were, how tender, how loving—those women—and he should never see his mother again. He had taken it very quietly when he got the letter announcing her death a week ago, but to-day, somehow, it came home to him more bitterly.

He had wasted the greater part of that money in a first-class passage to Natal, only to find that the man who is useless in the old country is equally useless in the colonies; and his little stock of money had melted to a single sovereign before, in desperation, he

accepted a post as tutor to some Boer children, whose English mother was ambitious for them. But he liked them no better than they liked him, and when the Zulu war broke out he enlisted in the Mounted Rifles. Then he saw service indeed, and had come through scatheless, but it brought him neither money, nor honour, nor glory; and Emmie wrote that their father still turned a deaf ear to their pleading.

A comrade spoke of Australia as the land of promise; a land flowing with milk and honey; and accordingly thither Will Hammond turned his longing eyes, and finally took a passage to Melbourne—steerage, this time—in one of the Orient Liners which, a few years back, sometimes went round the Cape.

But Australia was no kinder to him than Africa had been. A man without a profession, without even a trade, has but little chance in the great Colonial capital; and he drifted from one odd job to another, picking up a scanty living, but disheartened and despairing, when one day he met by chance and made himself known to his cousin, Walter Hammond.

The elder man had always considered his young cousin had been somewhat hardly dealt with, and being fairly well-to-do, took him home to his house in St. Kilda; saying he should stop with them till they could see what could be done.

That month's visit had been bliss to Will Hammond. His cousin and his cousin's wife had been kindness itself to him. And then there was Nellie Anderson—pretty Nellie Anderson, with her soft, dark eyes and clear, pale skin. She was Mrs. Hammond's great friend; she was always at "The Cedars," for her father, Dr. Anderson, lived next door; and what more natural than that the two young women should sit over their sewing together, and that she, the motherless daughter who reigned supreme over her father's household and her numerous younger brothers and sisters, should come to the older woman often for advice and help? She was the first woman in his own rank of life Will Hammond had met since he had left England. She was warm-hearted and sympathetic, and sincerely and unaffectedly sorry for the young Englishman whom the world seemed to have used so badly. Hammond had no more earnest listener than their elder sister when he told the Anderson children tales of African adventure, of the Zulu war and the Boer war, of Isandlwana and Ulundi. The boys listened open-mouthed, but Nellie never took her eyes off him.

"You must stop it, Mary; you really must," said Hammond to his wife before a week was past. "Will's head over ears in love with her; and she—well—well —— "

"But what can I do? She's got into the habit of running in and out at all hours now."

Like every woman, Mrs. Hammond liked a love story; and when both were young and good-looking and dear to her, her sympathies

were enlisted, and she had not the heart to stop it, even if she could.

"Let them alone, Walter; let them alone. Poor little Nell! I'd like her to have some happiness. That family, with all those big boys, is a great care to a girl of nineteen; and the Doctor's away so much, I don't believe he half realises what a hard life poor Nellie has."

"An unhappy love affair won't improve matters."

"It's only poverty," she pleaded. "Will is a good fellow; he really is—see how good he is to baby. His father?—— Oh, yes; I know that story—your uncle ought to have been ashamed of himself turning out a boy like that. A wicked old man, I call him. Get Will something to do, and he'll be all right, if he has Nellie to work for.'

But it was just the getting something to do that was so difficult; and so the days went on—idle days, in which Will Hammond had nothing to do but sit over the fire and read to the two women as they sat at their work.

The end was inevitable. He must not tell her, he kept saying to himself; he must never tell her—and yet one wintry afternoon when the rain was beating against the window-panes and the cold North wind was lashing the waters of Hobson's Bay into white breakers, and they two were left alone sitting cosily over the fire, he did tell her, and found, to his unspeakable joy, what Mary Hammond had seen days before, that his love was returned. How shy she was—his little girl; but how tender, how loving, and, above all, how hopeful.

"We are young enough," she said shyly, raising her face and looking into his. "We can wait, and you must work. I can't leave my father and the children for a long time yet, you know."

Oh, yes, he would work—but how? He talked it over with his cousin that night, and they decided that since he could get nothing to do that offered a competency in or near Melbourne, the best thing was to go out into the back blocks.

"And the farther the better," said Hammond. "If you're a thousand miles off it can't make much difference if you're two. I tell you what—I wonder I never thought of it before—I believe I can get you a billet on Mungadingadell, old Wilson's station, in Western Australia. It's five hundred miles back from Roebourne, a dreary spot, but I think, on the whole, that's all the better for you. You see, everything's found, and you can save nearly all your salary—be on the look-out—and if you come across any good country, why—take it up, either alone or shares with another fellow—that's the way money's made, now-a days."

It was all settled, and in less than a fortnight Will had started for Western Australia.

That was in August—and it was only December now, but it seemed to him years since he had left the house on the Esplanade at

St. Kilda—ages since he had seen the fair, pale face with the dark eyes full of tears.

"Oh, Nellie, Nellie, that was the worst parting of all."

The hut was very small, about twelve feet by twenty—built of slabs and bark roofed, with only the hard earth for flooring.

The bed-places were primitive bush stretchers made of sacking fixed on four posts; on one side of the fireplace was a rough shelf, which held a few books, and on the other was their scanty array of crockery—a rough table and two or three three-legged stools, and the flour barrel before mentioned, made up their furniture. Such was Muddy Creek, an out-station of Mungadingadell. James Hardy was in charge. Will Hammond had been sent out the week before as his mate, and Chung Lee was cook and hut-keeper. The head station was at least sixty miles away, and Hammond, as he filled his pipe, looked anxiously at Hardy, and wondered if he were really as ill as he thought himself. He had fallen into a troubled sleep and was tossing backwards and forwards, muttering to himself.

"Him welly sick," said Chung Lee, stealing in and standing beside him. "Him die soon."

"Hold your tongue, Chung Lee," said Hammond, angrily. "What do you know about it?" And he went to the door and stood looking out.

It was already four o'clock, but still over all the landscape was the haze of a great heat. The air quivered with it. Not a breath of wind stirred. The long, yellow grass was motionless, and the gum leaves on the tall, shadeless trees never moved. Not a sound was to be heard; even the shrill cicada and the grasshopper were silent, and the birds had all hidden themselves away from the sun. The forest was dense enough, but just round the hut was a small cleared paddock, where the men kept the horses they rode every day.

Hammond looked up at the sky, a cloudless sky of so deep a blue as almost to be purple.

"Nevertheless," he said to himself, "I believe we shall have a storm, and then Hardy'll be better." And he went back into the hut again, where Chung Lee was still intently regarding the sick man.

"Him die," he said laconically.

Hammond laid an angry hand on the Chinaman's shoulder, and then paused and looked at his mate. It was evident even to his inexperienced eyes that he was worse than he had been that morning, a great deal worse than the night before.

"I shall go into the head station for help," he said, more to himself than to the cook. But that Mongolian raised a loud protest; he was evidently afraid to be left alone, and every argument he could think of likely to detain his boss he brought forward in his pigeon English.

"He, Hammond, didn't know the way, and would get lost The blacks would attack the hut and eat them both up: and finally Hardy

would die, and he, Chung Lee, would be left alone with the body."

To all of these arguments Hammond turned a deaf ear. And when, after having caught and saddled his horse, he found his mate was delirious and did not know him, he was more determined than ever on going to the head station.

"Hang it all, shut up, Chung Lee," he said. "Lost? I'm not a fool, and there's a track all the way. The blacks haven't been here for a month, and I shall be back to-morrow."

So he set out. It was still very hot, very hot indeed, but the mere fact of doing something—being on the move—made him think less of it. Half-past four, and sixty miles to go. He ought to be there by ten; but no, he could hardly do that, for the moon didn't rise till half-past eight, and he couldn't follow the track in the dark. It would be dark in these latitudes about seven. Well, an hour and a half's rest would do both him and the mare no harm. He felt in better spirits now, and the world did not look so black as it had done when he sat in the hot little hut, watching helplessly as the sick man tossed to and fro. Hardy would get better once he had the proper medicines. There was nothing to be alarmed at—only a touch of fever—and there was country, he knew, well worth taking up a little further back Why should not he and Hardy go into partnership; it would be sure to pay, and in three years ——and as he rode on, building rosy castles in the air, the sun set, and it was time to camp.

He unsaddled the mare, hobbled her, and turned her loose to graze, and then, making a little fire, prepared his evening meal, boiling his billy and eating the damper and salt-beef, which was all Chung Lee had provided. He laughed softly to himself as he thought of the Mongolian's fear.

"Poor Chung Lee, how glad he'll be to see me back to-morrow."

His frugal meal finished, he laid himself down on the ground, his head pillowed on his saddle and gazing up through the branches of the big gum tree he had camped under at a particularly bright star, thought of Nellie, and fell fast asleep.

A crash of thunder wakened him, and he sat up for a moment wondering where he was.

"By Jove! Now for the rain."

There came a vivid flash of lightning, and by its glare he saw the mare close beside him. She was straining at her hobbles in her terror, and he started up to go to her and soothe her. Another deafening crash and down came a deluge of rain; but the mare, in her fright, had snapped her leathern hobbles, dry with the summer's heat, and with a shrill neigh galloped off into the rain and darkness.

In a moment he was after her. It would never do to lose the mare, with over forty miles yet to go before he reached the head

station. So, "Woa, mare—woa—Belle. Good old girl; woa, I say." But fainter and fainter grew the hoof-beats, and after a desperate attempt to keep up in the vain hope that she might hear his well-known voice and stop, he gave up, and, panting and breathless, leaned up against a tree-trunk.

"Nothing for it but to go back to Muddy Creek, I suppose, and it's at least fifteen miles."

Then, as soon as he got his breath again, he started for his camp. For a few minutes he walked back in the direction he had come, but saw no sign of the camp, the trees were so wonderfully alike; and besides, in this pouring rain, which was coming down in bucketsful, and the darkness, it was hardly likely he would find a tree marked only by his saddle, billy and cabbage-tree hat. He would wait till the storm was over and the moon rose. His light clothing was already wet through and through, and he was shivering with cold. Could it be that only this afternoon he had felt ill and languid from the great heat? Then he comforted himself; if he had to walk back, it was better to do it cool than hot; and he crushed down every boding fear that would rise unbidden in his mind, and, sheltering under the lee-side of a tree, listened to the monotonous sound of the rain till he dozed in spite of himself.

When he awoke the rain had quite gone, the sky was clear again, and the moon was shining brightly, turning to silver the long, narrow, wet gum leaves.

Now for the camp. Why, there was the very tree—no, there—a little to the right—but again to the left. Alas, the great, tall gum trees shut him in on every side, and one was so cruelly like another, he could not even remember now in which direction he had originally come. The camp did not so very much matter, but the track was of vital importance. Without that track he might wander for days hopelessly in the bush, and that meant—that meant—but no, he would not give up yet; it was nonsense to think he was lost. He had not run five minutes before he gave up the chase as hopeless; it was nonsense to think that in so short a time as that he could lose his way hopelessly.

Then he picked out a tree somewhat apart from its fellows and made with his knife a great blaze on it. "Now," he thought, "if I make diagonal stretches from this tree walking for a quarter of an hour in one direction and always coming back to it, I must surely find the track before I have been round the circle."

The first quarter of an hour his heart beat high with hope, and bitter was his disappointment as he returned on his tracks. Again he set out, and again—it was fruitless—and again, and again, and again. All the weary night he walked till the moonbeams began to pale before the coming day. And then, utterly weary and foot-sore, he flung himself down on the ground and covered his face with his hands. "Lost, lost, lost," the words rang in his ears—"utterly lost."

How many tales of lost men he had listened to, and the end had been always the same, and now he was lost himself.

Even if his horse found her way back to Muddy Creek, Hardy was ill, delirious probably, and Chung Lee was useless. It would be a week at least before they would send out to Muddy Creek from the head station—a week before they could even hear of his loss.

He had no food, no water—long before then the cruel hot sun rising up over the tree-tops would have dried up the puddles left by last night's rain, and he must perish, perish miserably by one of the most terrible of deaths. He lay and watched the sun till his eyes closed from very weariness and he fell into a troublous sleep and dreamt; not of Hardy and the little hut by the creek, not of Nellie Anderson and the house on the Esplanade at St. Kilda, but of his boyhood and his sister Emmie. He had hidden her hat and she was crying bitterly.

"It's no good, Em; it is no good. I won't give it back till you promise not to talk to Parker. I won't have you talk to Parker." And she had promised, and he had held out the hat to her, and behold—she was Chung Lee packing damper for him and muttering discontentedly: "Him get lost—him die."

He woke up then and started once more on his weary pilgrimage; but his thoughts were full of Emmie, and back there came to him many incidents of their childhood long ago forgotten.

How she had stood up for Parker, the schoolfellow he had always jeered at. She laughed at him herself, but she had allowed no one else to do so; and after all she had married him, given up everything and braved her father's displeasure to become a poor parson's wife far away in South Devon. Brave Emmie, good Emmie. Why, her boy must be nearly a year old now; the boy she wrote she had called after her dearest brother. He thought about them all day long as he walked backwards and forwards, resolutely putting away another face that would come before him. He could not think of Nellie; he dared not. And on every side the pools were shrinking, shrinking, and he knew that by to-morrow there would hardly be a drop of water left. Part of the night he walked, part slept from very weariness; and when he awakened in the morning he saw that his worst fears were realised: every pool was dry and every trace of the late storm had departed. All the water that remained to him was contained in the little flask he had filled the night before, and that would hardly last him the day. He was hungry, too; ravenously hungry; and he thought grimly of the Zulu hunger belts as he tightened his own, but still he walked steadily on, though the very last rag of hope had left him. He had dreamt of his sister again—dreamt she was reproaching him for not having written. "You might have written, Will; even if you were lost, you might have written," and the thought kept recurring to him again and again—he might write—he must write.

By noon he had finished the last drop in his flask, and by four his lips were parched and dry with thirst, but the sun shone in a cloudless heaven, and there was no chance of rain. He was dying of thirst, and yet he was not fifteen miles from Muddy Creek and safety—if only he could find the way; if only—— He felt so strong and well; the blood was coursing through his veins; could it be that he must die—was dying—a slow and lingering death?

"It was cruel—cruel—oh, my God, my God!—cruel—anything but that."

The paroxysm of passion passed and he remembered his waking thoughts: that he must write; and took out his pocket-book. It was only a common one, but the leathern covers were strong and would probably resist the weather for some little time.

Was it worth while, he thought. Was there a chance of its ever being found? And then he opened it and wrote:

"DEAR LITTLE SISTER,—I have got off the track somehow and am lost in the bush. It just means death, dear, for though they'll be looking for me before the week's out, I can't last out so long. Don't grieve, dear, it's not as bad as you'd think. Say good-bye to the others. I have loved them, but we were always chums, weren't we? I thought of you all last night—you and your boy. My watch is for him—the chain isn't up to much, but it's a rattling good watch. God keep you, little sister. "Your loving brother,

"WILL."

The other letter was harder.

"Oh, my darling," he wrote at last, "my darling, how can I say good-bye? You gave me the happiest days of my life; it is something to remember, even now. Don't grieve, my sweetheart—not too much. All my hopes and thoughts have been for you. Indeed I have loved you, darling—I do love you; but it is nearly all over now. Good-bye, my sweetheart—good-bye. Till death I am your loving

"WILL."

The tears came into his eyes as he finished: tears, not for himself, but for the loving women who, maybe, would read those pencilled lines, and he kissed the senseless pages because of the tender hands that should touch them in the days to come.

Then on the first page of the book he wrote:

"To you who find this.

"I lost myself the night before last. The track's quite close, I know, but I can't find it. Please send this pocket-book and my watch and chain to Walter Hammond, Esq., The Esplanade, St. Kilda; he will know what to do with them. For mercy's sake don't forget—it is the last request of a dying man. For the love of God do this. It is the last request of Will Hammond of Muddy Creek, Mungadingadell."

As he read them over, the words seemed to him poor and feeble, but there was nothing for it, so he let them stand and added:

"Good-bye, Walter, old fellow; to you and your wife I owe the deepest gratitude. You did your best for me. Tell Mary to be good to my poor little sweetheart."

He closed the book then and walked on. Had he done with the world? Were they his last words? Should he never, never see a kindly human face—hear a kindly human voice again?

Impossible he could be dying. Impossible, and yet all round him stretched the still, hot bush. Not a drop of water; not a drop; the agony seemed more than he could bear. He put a gum-leaf in his mouth, and the strong, pungent, aromatic flavour only made his thirst worse than ever.

The day drew slowly on to a close—the second day. It hardly seemed any cooler but the shadows grew longer and longer, and the insects and birds once more began to stir around. From a dead tree close beside him a laughing jackal raised his hoarse demon-laugh, and was answered by his mate half a mile away; far, far in the distance sounded the note of the bell-bird: sweet and holy, like the sound of a deep-toned church bell, and far overhead flew a flock of cockatoos, tiny white specks against the deep blue sky. Where they alighted would be water, he knew, but they held steadily on, and as they passed out of sight he sank on his knees with a great sob.

"Oh, my God, my God! Is there no help—none?"

The night came, and he tried to keep steadily on. If he could only find the track all might yet be well. Fantastic shapes seemed to come out of the darkness, and he sat down and covered his eyes and dozed till the moon rose—the tropical moon that made the forest bright as day, save where the shadows by contrast were blacker than the blackest night. The sleep had not refreshed him; he was weary unto death, and there came to him a great longing to die then, if he must die—then in the cool, clear moonlight, not with the cruel, pitiless sun pouring down on him. If he could only die that night instead of lingering on! But he knew he should not die that night, and he rose and struggled on, though his mouth was parched and dry, his lips and tongue swollen, and his limbs ached till he felt he could hardly put one foot before another. Still he dragged himself on, and a curious fancy came into his head that his mother, his dead mother, was walking beside him, and it comforted him somehow.

"There is no love like a mother's," he thought; "and now she has come to me in my extremity. Who would have come to me but my mother?"

Then again he roused himself and remembered he must be dreaming. Lost men went mad, he knew. Was he going mad? Not yet, at least; clearly he understood what had happened, and he pulled himself together with a mighty effort, only to begin wondering

why Nellie had not come to him. Was it that her love would not stand such a test? But, no; no, he did not want her to suffer; she should never know what he had suffered, if he could help it; and he toiled on again, as if every step were bringing him nearer to her. It was a long, long night; but the daylight came at last—the cruel, garish daylight; and he remembered it was Sunday. They would be going to church down in St. Kilda. He pictured them to himself: Nellie, with her brothers and sisters in a row beside her, joining in the joyous Christmas hymns. Why were they singing hymns, joyful hymns, when he was slowly dying alone in the bush? "Oh, come let us adore Him! Oh, come let us adore Him!" How clearly the words rang out; how sweet was Nellie's voice! But, no; they were not singing hymns; it was the low and solemn chant of the Litany: "Good Lord, deliver us! Good Lord, deliver us!" And it seemed to him he himself was joining in the prayer, in a very agony: "Deliver us—deliver us! Good Lord, deliver us!" Almost he fancied he could hear the rain-drops beating against the window-panes—the old leaded panes in the ivy-covered church in far-away England. The cold, pleasant rain; and he longed to turn and look, but his mother's gentle hand kept her wilful boy still. But was it his mother? Surely his mother would never have been so cruel—it was Chung Lee—Chung Lee, who held him fast. And—he rubbed his eyes—he was dreaming—dreaming there was no church, no rain-drops, no solemn Litany; only the hot, lonely bush, and he must be going mad. He took out his little pocket-book and wrote in it, "I am going mad;" and then a pitiful thought for those who might read it and grieve over it made him tear out the page.

He tried to keep steadily on, to make diagonal stretches as he had done at first; but it was hard work. It seemed to him only by chance he found the blazed tree again, and to-day he lost it altogether.

The shadows lengthened again, and again the cockatoos flew screaming overhead to the distant water-hole so far beyond his reach. But he only followed them longingly with his bloodshot eyes. He knew now that never in this life should he quench his thirst again. Only it was so hard, so cruelly hard—if he could only die—die now—if Death—that great deliverer—would free him from his pain. He was almost past walking now, but still he made an effort, sometimes falling, but always, however terrible the struggle, crawling on again. And so the night passed slowly—slowly—and another day dawned, and he knew as he watched the sun rise blood-red above the tree tops that he could go no further, that the end must come soon.

The thought came that perhaps the searchers who would come some day would pass this place by—and with infinite pains he dragged himself to his feet, and leaning against a tree trunk, took out his knife, and tried to cut STOP on the hard bark. But sight and

sense were failing fast. The landscape swam one great blur the colour of blood before his eyes, the knife slipped from his fingers, and he sank to his knees. "Oh, my God, my God, pity me." Again he took out the little pocket-book and scrawled across the page—he could not see—"God bless my darling," then with it still clasped in his hand, fell forward on his face.

Who shall tell the rest? Who shall say when the Mighty Death-Angel touched his eyes with tender merciful fingers and brought him peace and rest?

Three days later they found him not two hundred yards from the track he had sought so long, and with kindly hands laid him in his grave beneath the big oak tree where his failing hands had tried to carve a prayer that they would stop. It is an old story now in Mungadingadell; only sometimes over the camp-fire they tell how Will Hammond was lost in the Waroona Scrub, in the year when the two imported rams died. Even to his favourite sister he is but a tender, pitiful memory, and only Dr. Anderson's little daughter, crying her heart out over that soiled pocket-book, knows she can never, never forget the young fellow who brought bliss into her life for a few brief days, and then went out of it for ever.

## APPARITION.

*(From Victor Hugo.)*

I saw an angel float above my head;
His flight the tempest stilled, and calmed the sea.
"What seekest thou, O angel fair?" I said,
"In this sad midnight hour?"
He answered me:
"I come to take thy soul."
"Where?—tell me where.
Into what dwelling, heavenly messenger?"
But he was silent.
"Art thou Death?" I cried—
"Or art thou Life?"
"Nor Life nor Death," he sighed.
"They call me *Love*."
Then on his brow there fell
A light that was more glorious than the spring—
And in the depths of gloom inscrutable
Stars trembled through the feathers of his wing.

C. E. Meetkerke.

M. L. GOW. R. TAYLOR.

HE STAGGERED FORWARD WITH A GROAN, AND LIFTED THE COLD HAND THAT WOULD NEVER GRASP HIS AGAIN.

THE ARGOSY.

*AUGUST, 1891.*

# THE FATE OF THE HARA DIAMOND.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### ROOM NUMBER FOUR IN THE CORRIDOR.

IT has now become requisite to return to Captain Ducie, whose proceedings have been neglected for some time past.

When we left him last he had just found on the floor of his host's private library one of the tiny paper pellets which he had dropped purposely from his pocket when blindfolded the previous night. The finding of this pellet he looked on as proof-positive that the entrance to the hiding-place of the Diamond must be in that room. His discovery was an important one. It was his first step towards that goal whither all his hopes and wishes now tended. It placed him at once on a certain vantage ground. Still he was puzzled by the consideration of what his second step ought to be. For some time he could not see his way at all.

On the pretence of wanting some particular volume from its shelves he contrived once and again to visit the private library while Platzoff was engaged elsewhere. But he could not visit it without first asking permission, owing to the simple fact of its door being always kept locked. The required permission was grudgingly granted by Platzoff—he could see that; also that it would not be wise to court the privilege too often. Indeed, it was a privilege that proved of little or no service, either Cleon or Jasmin being sent with him to unlock and relock the door, and evidently having secret instructions not to leave the library so long as he was in it. While looking for the required volume he could merely take a few careless glances around, and such glances merely served to show him that the line of bookshelves was unbroken except by the two doorways and the fireplace. He had not, indeed, been sanguine enough to expect that such a casual examination would reveal to him the secret entrance that led to the cavern. But he had half hoped that by some faint sign, by some insignificant token, which to those not in the secret

would seem utterly meaningless, he might be able to seize on the first hint of the wished-for clue. But so far he was doomed to disappointment. No sign or token of the faintest kind was visible to his quick-searching eyes.

So day after day came and went till but two days remained before the time fixed for his departure, and it seemed to him that he might just as well have never heard of the existence of the Hara Diamond, much less have been favoured with the sight of it, for any use that he could make of his knowledge. Turn the subject in his mind which way he would, in this light and in that, there seemed no escape from the difficulty in which he now found himself. But however much Captain Ducie might be inwardly chagrined he betrayed no traces of it on the surface. On the contrary, he had never striven more assiduously to make himself agreeable to his host than he did during this period of his deepest mortification. In every way that he could possibly think of he tried to make himself indispensable to Platzoff—or, if not indispensable, such a pleasant element, such a piquant seasoning to the course of everyday life at Bon Repos, that the Russian should part from him with regret, and nothing be wanting to secure another invitation to the same roof in time to come. These exertions were not without their reward—a more immediate reward than he had ventured to hope for. On the morning of the day but one before that of his departure, as he and Platzoff were sitting together in a summerhouse that overlooked the lake, said the Captain, after a pause in the conversation: "Three days hence, instead of having this pleasant scene to gaze upon at will, I shall have nothing but London's dusty streets with which to solace my eyes. But, in any case, I shall have a store of pleasant recollections to take back with me."

"Is the time of your leaving me so near?" said the Russian. "In the pleasure of your society I had almost forgotten that such a time must necessarily come. But why go, cher ami? Why not extend your visit until—until you are tired of us and our quiet life, if, indeed, you are not that already?"

Captain Ducie shook his head. "My sojourn at Bon Repos has been a very pleasant one," he said, "and I am by no means tired of it. But other engagements claim my attention, and I am afraid that I dare not make any longer stay here."

"See, then. You can do this to oblige an old man," said Platzoff. "Of late I have not been well—in fact, I have never quite got over that accident on the railway. My doctor down here does not seem to understand what ails me, and I have had some thought of going up to London for the sake of better advice. I cannot, however, go for three weeks: there are certain matters that must be attended to before I can leave Bon Repos even for a few days. See, now. You shall put off your journey for three weeks, and then we will go up to town together. Que dites vous?"

Of course Captain Ducie could do nothing but accede as gracefully as possible to his host's request. He was, in truth, very well pleased to accede to it, even although the three weeks in question might do nothing towards the accomplishment of his secret hopes. Bon Repos was decidedly preferable to two stuffy rooms in a London back street, especially at a season of the year when the hegira of the fashionable world was just setting in. He would stay where he was as long as it was possible to do so.

There had been no conversation between Ducie and Platzoff respecting the Diamond since the night they two had visited the cavern together. Ducie had tried to broach the subject once or twice, but Platzoff had fought so shy of it that the Captain had not ventured to proceed, but had turned the conversation into other channels. It seemed to Ducie as if Platzoff half repented having taking him so fully into his confidence. It was evidently not his intention to enlighten him any further in the matter.

The first week of the three had come to an end. According to custom, Ducie and Platzoff were sitting together on a certain evening in the smoke-room. It was one of the Russian's drashkil nights. He had been smoking hard and fast, and was already in a state of coma, lost to all outward influences. Ducie looked at his watch, debating within himself whether it would not be wiser on his part to go off to bed than to sit there any longer with his unconscious host. And yet it was only half-past ten—rather early for bed. He sat staring at his host, and toying absently with his watch-guard, when, clear and vivid as a shaft of lightning, there flashed across his brain a thought that struck him breathless for one moment, and the next startled him into the most intense life. He rose noiselessly to his feet, and stood for a full minute with his fingers pressed to his eyes, thinking, so it seemed to him, as he had never thought before.

That one minute sufficed to elaborate the scheme that had come to him as suddenly and as startlingly as a veritable inspiration of genius. Had his thoughts clothed themselves in words, they would have expressed themselves somewhat after this fashion :

"It is only half-past ten o'clock, and Platzoff has smoked himself into a state of unconsciousness. On no account is he ever disturbed by his valet till the clock strikes twelve : ergo, I have an hour and a half before me safe from interruption. Platzoff always carries about with him a silver pass-key that will open every door in the house, unless it be those of the bedrooms of his guests and his servants. Suppose I possess myself of that pass-key for the time being, and penetrate by its assistance into the library. Once in the library with a clear hour and a half to call my own, it will be strange if I cannot succeed in making some discovery that will prove of service to me."

The first thing to be done was to satisfy himself that Platzoff was really and truly unconscious. Taking him by the arm, he shook him, gently at first, and then with greater violence. But the Russian

only uttered a low, inarticulate moan of protest. Then Ducie ventured to lift up one of his eyelids. The glazed, fishy look of the eye below it was sufficient to convince him that from Platzoff himself he had nothing to fear. Then, with a light-fingered dexterity that would not have discredited a professional pickpocket, he began to search for the silver key. He was not long in finding it. There it was, in a small inner pocket of Platzoff's vest. He drew it out with a heart that beat a little faster than common. So far all was well. He stood for a few moments with the key in his fingers, listening intently. Not a sound of any kind inside the house or out. As he stood thus, he bethought himself of a little brass bolt on the inside of the door that opened into the corridor. By means of this bolt Platzoff could at will secure himself even against the intrusion of Cleon. This bolt Ducie now shot noiselessly into its socket. If Cleon—or rather Jasmin, now that Cleon was ill—were inadvertently to come before his proper hour, he would have to wait till the door was opened for him from within. Having thus secured himself against any possible interruption, Ducie, after taking a last glance at his host, walked boldly across the room, and applying the key, opened the inner door and passed forward into the dressing-room. From the dressing-room he gained access to the bedroom, and from thence into the library. The latter room being in entire darkness, he had to go back into the bedroom for a candle, two of which were always lighted there at dusk and kept burning till M. Platzoff went to bed.

As already stated, the library had two doors opening into it, one that gave from the bedroom, and another that faced you as you went in. A brown curtain fixed by means of rings on a brass rod hung before this second door. Ducie never remembered having seen this curtain more than three parts drawn, leaving visible a small portion of the door. In fact, it appeared to him, considering the matter, as though the curtain were never touched, its exact position seemed so unaltered from time to time. His first idea on his first visit to the library after his sight of the Diamond, had been that through this second door lay the secret entrance to the cavern. But it was an idea that found no resting place in his mind. The Russian was not the sort of man to adopt such a palpable expedient as an ordinary door to mark the entrance to the secret staircase. Ducie had felt convinced at the time that behind those ponderous bookshelves lay the hidden entrance, and he was equally convinced of it to-night. Therefore, instead of taking any notice of the second door, he at once proceeded, candle in hand, to make an examination of the shelves.

They were made of mahogany, substantial and old-fashioned, with elaborate flutings between each compartment, and were crowned with carved bosses of fruit and flowers intermixed. Every shelf was completely filled with books, none of which were dummies, as

Captain Ducie took care to verify. Beginning at the right-hand corner, he went completely round the room. The fireplace, too, came in for an amount of critical examination such as had probably never been bestowed on it before. The window that gave light to the library was in the outer wall of the house, and looked on to the lawn. Like all the windows in M. Platzoff's private suite it was crossed and recrossed by some half-dozen iron bars artfully let into the woodwork so as not to be visible from without. The outside walls of Bon Repos were of an antique thickness, as though they had been built to last a thousand years. They were, in fact, quite thick enough to allow of a narrow staircase being hollowed out of their substance. It seemed, therefore, to Ducie just as necessary to examine carefully that side of the room as it did to examine the inner side.

He examined both the sides and the ends, carefully, thoroughly; but the result of his examination was that he was exactly as wise when he left off as when he began. Not a crevice, not a cranny, not a discoloration of the wood, not the faintest trace of a secret spring was anywhere to be found. He tapped each panel and compartment separately with his knuckles, but he was unable to trace any difference in the dull dead sound given out by each and all. Then he went down on his knees to examine the carpet. It was a sombre velvet pile, and was nailed down at the edges with a number of small tin-tacks driven through it into the floor. The corners of the carpet had not been carefully swept, and the tiny indentations in it where it was pressed down by the heads of the tacks were full of dust. "Now," argued Captain Ducie with himself, "if the entrance to the cavern where the Diamond is hidden is through an opening in the floor of this room, then, in order to reach that opening this carpet or a portion of it must be taken up. Is it likely that M. Platzoff, who by his own account visits his Diamond at least once a week, would take up and nail down his carpet every time he wishes to look on his wonderful gem? Further, if the carpet had been lately taken up, the indentations caused by the heads of the nails would not be full of dust, as they are now. The nails now in have not been touched for a month at the least."

Captain Ducie rose from his unwonted position, and put down his candle on the table with a muttered oath. He was baffled at every turn. He felt ready to knock his head against the wall, so eaten up was he with inward rage and mortification. But it was the cunning of the serpent and not the rage of the lion that was needed in his case. He flung himself into a chair, and in a few minutes had cooled down sufficiently to consider what his next step ought to be. Was any other step possible to him? he asked himself.

And then he answered himself with a lugubrious shake of the head. Only one thing remained to be tried, and that was the second door. It might be just as well to ascertain, if it were possible to do so, on

what part of the house it opened. He had no recollection of having seen such a door in his perambulations about the interior of Bon Repos.

The brown curtain that hung before the second door was only half drawn. Captain Ducie drew it impatiently on one side and inserted his pass-key into the lock. It turned without difficulty, but on trying to push open the door, he found that it stuck and did not readily give way. This fact, slight as it seemed, proved to the Captain that the road to the hiding-place of the Diamond did not lie through that door. The door when opened revealed a narrow and gloomy corridor thickly carpeted with dust. One side of this corridor was formed by a bare, unbroken wall. On the opposite side, at intervals of a few feet, were four doors, all now locked. There was yet another door at the end of the corridor opposite to that by which Ducie had entered. This last door was not merely locked, but was further secured by some half-dozen large screws, driven through the inner side and wormed deep into the massive posts.

When he had so far completed his examination, Captain Ducie turned to the four side doors. In the case of these also he found his pass-key available. Still carrying the light in his hand, he opened the first door and found himself in a gloomy and shuttered bedroom, which had evidently not been occupied for a very long time. From this an inside door opened into a dressing-room, also shuttered and thick with dust. The second door in the corridor led also into this dressing-room. The third door in the corridor opened into another bedroom, and the fourth into its adjoining dressing-room. These two latter rooms, like the first two, had apparently not been entered for years.

To Captain Ducie it seemed plain enough why these rooms were kept untenanted, and the door at the extreme end of the corridor nailed up. M. Platzoff evidently did not choose that anyone should come into too close proximity to the room within which lay the secret of the hidden door. For that the hidden door was in the library everything he had discovered that night went indisputably to prove. He relocked the four rooms, and went back to the library, musing upon all he had seen. He was just about to shut and fasten the curtained door when a sudden thought struck him and caused him to pause. He stood musing for a few moments, his face gradually brightening the while, and then taking up his candle, he retraced his way to the fourth room in the corridor. He went in, put down his light, and succeeded after some difficulty in unfastening the shutters, which were strongly barred with iron. This done, he shut up his candle for a while in an empty wardrobe, and then proceeded to fold back the shutters. The night was a fine one, and the stars afforded him sufficient light for what he wanted to do next. Between the shutters and the window was a faded green blind, at present drawn up about three parts of the way to the top. From this blind de-

pended a green cord that ended in a tassel. In this cord Captain Ducie tied a simple slip-knot. When this was done, he unhasped the window, and tried whether the lower sash would work up and down readily and without too much noise. Finding that the window worked satisfactorily, he left it unfastened, and then proceeded to put back the shutters, which also he left unbolted. Then he took his candle out of its hiding-place and went back to the library, closing behind him both the door that led into the corridor and the curtained door, but leaving them both unlocked.

Midnight was now close at hand, and it was necessary that he should get back to the smoke-room. But even with more time at his command, he could have done nothing more to-night. When he got back to the smoke-room, he found Platzoff to all appearance precisely as he had left him. He put back the pass-key into the pocket from which he had taken it, and unbolted the outer door. Ten minutes later Jasmin, the new valet, acting temporarily in place of Cleon, coming into the room, found Captain Ducie quietly smoking beside the comatose body of his master.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### AT THE CURTAINED DOOR.

At an early hour next morning, in fact long before M. Platzoff was out of bed, Captain Ducie, cigar in hand, took a ramble round the exterior of Bon Repos. While exploring the four rooms on the preceding evening he was struck with the recollection of having on one occasion seen their shuttered windows from the outside. A day or two after his arrival at Bon Repos he had gone on an exploring expedition about the grounds, and it was on that occasion that he had seen them. He had taken them as ordinary unused chambers, and had had no further curiosity respecting them. He remembered now that they looked—or would have looked if their shutters had been open—into a very thick bit of shrubbery, so dense, in fact, as to be all but impenetrable, and looking as if it had not been pruned for years. And yet this very bit of shrubbery was within a few feet of the delicious little flower-studded lawn on to which the windows of Platzoff's private rooms opened; indeed, the four shut-up rooms were merely a continuation of the same wing in which the private rooms were situated. It was evident that since the four rooms had been disused the shrubbery outside them had been allowed to grow as thick and wild as it chose, as though it were Platzoff's wish to screen them as much as possible from observation.

Captain Ducie having pierced this shrubbery, found himself within sight of the four windows, and saw that he had not been mistaken as to their position. Through the dusty panes of the last window of the four he could just make out the knotted cord as he had left it

over night. He took a few quiet observations, unseen by anyone, and then went back indoors.

That night, as usual, Captain Ducie accompanied his host to the smoke-room. Drashkil was not introduced, and the two friends passed a pleasant evening, smoking and conversing. As midnight struck, Jasmin entered. Ducie rose, shook hands with Platzoff, bade him good-night, and retired. Having reached his own room, he locked the door. Then he proceeded to dress himself in a suit of dark grey tweed. On his feet he put a pair of Indian mocassins. His next proceeding was to produce a coil of strong rope from one of his trunks, one end of which he tied firmly to the top bar of the firegrate. This done, he blew out the candle, drew up the blind, and opened the window. The night was fine, but overcast, and rather cold for the time of year. Having waited till he heard the clock strike one, he lowered the other end of the rope out of the open window. After listening intently for full two minutes he let himself quietly down, sailor fashion, and landed safely on the turf below. Then he paused again to listen. That part of the grounds in which he now found himself was very quiet and secluded even by day, but neither there nor in any other part of the little demesne was there any likelihood that his proceedings would be observed at that uncanny hour. The rule at Bon Repos was that all the servants, except Cleon, should go to bed, and the house be finally closed, at half-past eleven, and the time was now ten minutes past one. Still, Captain Ducie was not a man to neglect any precaution that presented itself to his mind. Keeping well under the deeper shadow of the trees, and walking lightly on the soft turf, he was not long before he found himself close under the window with the knotted cord. He had scanned Platzoff's windows anxiously in passing, but they were so closely shuttered and curtained that it was impossible to tell whether or no the Russian had yet retired to rest.

As previously stated, the whole of Platzoff's private rooms were on the ground floor: equally as a matter of course, the four rooms that opened out of the corridor were on the same level. A slight spring sufficed to place Captain Ducie on the window-sill of the room he wished to enter. Despite all his care, he could not prevent the creaking of the window as he pushed up the sash; but he trusted to the remoteness of Platzoff's bedroom not to be overheard. Then he pushed open the shutters and stepped lightly down into the dark room. He had noted the position of the furniture when there the previous night, and he knew that there was a clear course to the door. Another pause, to listen; then noiselessly across the floor; out by way of the door left unlocked last night, and so into the corridor; then forward, silent as a shadow, to the curtained door that opened into Platzoff's room.

Captain Ducie was far from being a nervous man, yet it is quite certain that his pulses beat by no means so equably as on ordinary

occasions as he stood in the dark corridor, all his senses on the alert, his fingers on the handle of the door; dreading to take the next step, which must yet be taken or all that he had hitherto done be rendered nugatory; and stubbornly determined in his inmost heart that it should be taken, happen what might. An indrawing of the breath, a moment's pause, a turn of the handle, and almost before he knew that he was there he found himself standing behind the curtain and on the threshold of M. Platzoff's private rooms.

Not the faintest sound of any kind. Ducie stretched forth a hand and little by little drew back the curtain sufficiently to enable him to peer into the room. It was dark and empty; but he could see that a faint light was burning in the bedroom beyond. Now that the curtain was partly drawn aside he could hear the low, regular breathing of M. Platzoff as that gentleman lay asleep in bed. Ducie knew what a light sleeper Platzoff was when not under the influence of his favourite drug, and he durst not venture a step beyond the spot where he was now standing. Indeed, there was no reason why he should so venture. There was nothing whatever to be gained by such a rash proceeding. It was Platzoff's habit (so the Russian himself had given Ducie to understand) to visit the Diamond once, sometimes twice a week. These visits generally took place during the small hours of the morning when Platzoff awoke, restless and uneasy, from his first sleep. All, therefore, that Ducie had now to do was to wait quietly for one of these occasions, and take advantage of it when it should come, in such a way as might seem advisable to him at the time.

This was the reason why Captain Ducie did not stir from his hiding-place behind the curtain. This was the reason why he stood there for two full hours to-night as patiently as if he had been cast in bronze. But on this occasion his waiting was in vain. When he had been there about an hour and a half, M. Platzoff woke up, took a pinch of snuff, sneezed, spoke a few words aloud in some language which Ducie did not understand, and then addressed himself to sleep again. Ducie waited a full half-hour longer without stirring. Then he went quietly back by the way he had come, shutting behind him the two doors, the shutters, and the window, but leaving them all unfastened—indeed, he had no means of fastening them, even had he been so minded. He got back unseen to his own room.

The same hour next night saw Captain Ducie behind the curtained door. He knew that several nights might elapse before Platzoff should visit the Diamond, and he was quite prepared to wait there night after night till his perseverance should be crowned with success. It was just as well, perhaps, that he had made up his mind to play a waiting game, seeing that five nights passed one after another, on no one of which did he fail in his watch at the curtained door, before Platzoff, taking counsel with himself, made up his mind to again visit the cavern.

It was on a certain night—or rather morning, being about three a.m.—after one of his drashkil debauches, that the Russian so made up his mind. Ducie was in patient waiting. From his hiding-place behind the curtain he heard Platzoff get out of bed. When he saw him put on his dressing-gown and light a small lamp—the same that the Russian had made use of on the night that Ducie accompanied him—then the latter knew that his patience was about to be rewarded.

As Platzoff advanced into the library, Ducie shrank back, and noiselessly closed the door that led into the corridor. He thought it just possible that Platzoff might lift the curtain to make sure that there was no one in hiding. Standing with his hand on the door, and listening intently, Ducie could hear Platzoff moving about the library. Then he heard the click of a spring or bolt, and a sound like the rolling back of a door or panel. Then all was still.

After waiting for a couple of minutes, during which the silence remained unbroken, Ducie slowly opened the door, and moved forward till his face nearly touched the curtain. He could hear nothing save the beating of his own heart. Drawing the curtain an inch or two on one side, he peeped. The library was empty, and the secret door was open.

For a few seconds he felt like a man in a dream; he could hardly believe in the reality of what he saw before him. But the thought that in ten or twelve minutes at the farthest M. Platzoff would be back again, and that now or never was his opportunity, quickened him into action. His object to-night was to take such accurate note of the position of the secret door, and the means by which it was opened and shut, as would enable him in time to come to find it again without much difficulty. Platzoff was in the cavern below, and till the sound of his returning footsteps could be heard Ducie knew that he was safe.

Moving noiselessly forward into the room, he went down on one knee, and proceeded to make a careful examination of the secret door. Then he took a measuring-tape out of his pocket, and proceeded to measure the exact distance of the opening from the upper end of the room. Then he took his penknife and cut away a couple of threads out of the carpet close to the bookcase, at those points precisely where the secret door fitted into it when shut. Not less carefully did he examine the spring, and the mode by which it was acted on when the door was closed. There was nothing very complicated about it now that its mechanism was laid bare. A very slight examination sufficed to show Ducie its method of working, and where and how it was opened from without.

A faint noise from below warned him that his time was up. He glided back as noiselessly as he had come, and disappeared behind the curtain just as M. Platzoff began to ascend the steps that led from the cavern.

Captain Ducie stood with his hand on the door of the corridor for a full hour before he ventured to take another step in retreat. Then judging that Platzoff, who had gone to bed again, could not fail to be asleep, he went quietly back by the way he had come.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### THE LITTLE PACKET FROM LONDON.

NEXT morning, immediately after breakfast, Captain Ducie shut himself up in his own room on the plea of having several important letters to write. The letters resolved themselves into one note, of no great length, addressed to a friend in London—to the same friend, in fact, to whom he had applied for a translation of the stolen cryptogram. Although the note did not contain more than a dozen lines, Captain Ducie was unusually particular as to its composition. He corrected and rewrote it several times before he was satisfied. Then he sealed and directed it, and went down into the village and posted it himself. Then he set himself to wait patiently for a reply.

A reply came on the fifth day by post, in the shape of a tiny square packet. Captain Ducie received the packet from Jasmin with apparent indifference, but he did not open it till he was alone. The contents consisted of a brief note from his friend, inside which was a small square box made of very thin wood, which proved to be filled with some dark, fatty-looking substance, from which exhaled a faint, sickly odour that was far from pleasant. The following is a copy of the note:—

"MY DEAR DUCIE,—I send you a small quantity of the drug you ask for. I dare say there will be enough to serve your purpose. It is an exceedingly powerful narcotic, and very little of it must be used at one time. I greatly question the advisability of using it at all in the case of neuralgic pains such as you describe, but I presume you are acting under advice.

"Glad to hear that you are enjoying yourself so thoroughly. Town is anything but pleasant at this time of the year, and to be strolling on the banks of Windermere would suit much better the idiosyncrasy of

Your languid but devoted friend,

"GEO. BEXELL."

Captain Ducie, after taking one whiff at the contents of the box, put it carefully away under lock and key. Nothing further could be done till the next evening that his host might devote to drashkil-smoking. For that occasion he had not long to wait.

Ducie was now so far familiar with the process of drashkil-smoking and its results that, from the first evening of Cleon's absence, he had taken upon himself the office of preparing M. Platzoff's pipe. This he did in that easy, good-natured way which sat so gracefully on him,

and made his simplest acts seem better than greater things done by another. On the first "big smoke night" after his receipt of the tiny packet from London, Ducie did not fail to proffer his services as usual, and Platzoff was glad to accept them. This evening, as he charged the pipe out of the little silver box in which the preparation was always kept, he turned his back on the Russian, who was lazily reclining on the low cushioned seat that ran round the room, and seemed longer than usual in filling it to his mind. Platzoff was not heeding him at all, but was gazing with half-shut eyes on the lamp, of Oriental workmanship, by which the room was lighted.

"What strange patterns or weavings of life we often get," he said, speaking more to himself than to Ducie, "when we are asleep, or in a fever, or in any other state in which the vagaries of the brain are no longer controlled by the force of reason, or no longer restrained by what you would call the trammels of common sense. It is like looking at life through a kaleidoscope—a strange jumble of many-coloured, differently-shaped fragments, which yet shake themselves into curious and unlooked-for patterns, that have oftentimes a beauty and coherence of their own, such as we seldom see in real life. Singular, too, that behind many of these brain-weavings, which at first sight seem so purposeless and absurd, there lurks an idea, sometimes a very subtle one, and wholly dissociated from any waking thought that we can remember. It is as if such an idea had found its way by chance into one's brain, and was determined to make its presence known by scratching a few quaint characters on the walls of its new domicile."

"You fly too high for me to follow you," said Ducie, with a laugh. "It is time you were ballasted with a pipe of your favourite drug. You have a lot of cobweb fancies in your brain that want clearing away. To-morrow you will be as practical and business-like as any Englishman of us all."

"I hope not. That is a level to which I do not aspire," answered Platzoff. "There is not sufficient far niente in the character of you English. You lack repose, and the grace of inaction. You are the world's plough-horses. It is your place to do the hard work of the universe. Beyond that you are good for little. *Mais donnez-moi ma pipe, monsieur, s'il vous plait.* That is my consolation for all the faults of the world."

He took the amber mouthpiece between his lips, and Ducie applied a match to the bowl. Spirals of thick white smoke, emitted from the Russian's mouth, began to ascend slowly in languid, viperous wreaths towards the roof. Soon a dull, drowsy film began to thicken in his eyes and to quench their light. Soon the muscles of his face began to relax, and all expression, save one of vacuous self-enjoyment, to fade out of his features as daylight dies slowly out of a landscape at set of sun. Ducie had filled for himself a pipe of cavendish, and now sat down a yard or two removed from his host.

"Ducie, my friend," said Platzoff, speaking already in tones that were strangely unlike his own, "there is a peculiar flavour about my pipe to-night, such as I never remember to have experienced before. I cannot understand it."

"Is it a flavour that you like, or one that you dislike?"

"I don't altogether dislike it," answered Platzoff. "But why is it there at all?"

"Can't say, I am sure," replied Ducie, in his quiet way. "I filled your pipe this evening out of a fresh lot of drashkil that Cleon mixed for you this morning. Perhaps your taste is out of order."

"Perhaps so. Anyway, the pipe is delicious, but terribly strong. I can talk no more. Bon soir, ami, and pleasant dreams."

"In another ten minutes he will be as firm as a rock," murmured Ducie to himself. He looked at his watch. It was just eleven o'clock.

Ducie sat smoking his cavendish and watching his host stealthily from under his thick eyebrows. He had put a very small portion of the contents of the little packet from London into Platzoff's pipe, and he was curious to see how it would act. His intention was simply to send Platzoff into a sounder sleep than usual, and so make sure that he would not be disturbed by the unexpected waking of the Russian later in the night.

For he had made up his mind that this night of all others he would steal the Hara Diamond. In his own thoughts he did not use such an ugly word as *steal* in connection with the affair. He merely remarked, as it were casually, to himself, that to-night he must appropriate the Diamond. He would retire at twelve o'clock as usual. Later on, when the last sitter-up could hardly fail to be asleep, he would come back, as he had come so many times of late, letting himself down by means of the rope from his own window; and so, by way of number four room and the corridor, reach M. Platzoff's private rooms. Once there, he could easily deprive the unconscious Russian of his pass-key; and now that he knew the secret of the hidden door, he would have no difficulty in making his way direct into the cavern; after which, to appropriate the Diamond would be the most natural thing in the world. Returning by the way he had come, he would carefully re-lock the cavern doors and shut the secret door. He would replace the pass-key in Platzoff's pocket, and retire unseen to his own room. Not improbably days would elapse before Platzoff again went to look at his Diamond, and when he should find that it was gone—what then? Why should he, Ducie, be suspected of stealing it any more than anyone else who might happen to be in the house? And even granting the worst—that Platzoff suspected him of stealing the Diamond, even charged him with stealing it? For the suspicion he did not care one groat, and the charge was one that could not be proved. The only result would be a quarrel between himself and M. Platzoff, and a premature de-

parture from Bon Repos. All this would not be difficult to bear. The fact of the Diamond being his at last would act as a salve for all the minor ills of life.

So ran Captain Ducie's thoughts as he sat smoking and watching M. Platzoff's faculties fade gradually out, like those of a very old man who had outlived his proper age. To-night the process was swifter than usual, thanks to the narcotic which he had put unseen into the Russian's pipe. He looked on with a complacent smile, caressing his moustache now and again.

Platzoff passed quickly from stage to stage of the process, till, in no long time, complete coma supervened, and he lived no longer save in the opium smoker's fantastic world. The light in his pipe died out, the amber mouthpiece slipped from between his lips, his fingers relaxed their hold on the stem, his head drooped, his jaw fell slightly, a thin dark line marked the space between his imperfectly closed eyelids. He sighed gently twice, and was gone.

To all these signs Captain Ducie was now well accustomed, and he regarded them entirely as a matter of course. He refilled his pipe, and lay back, with his hands clasped under his head, gazing up at the gaudy ceiling, and building pleasant castles in the air. As the clock struck twelve, Cleon or Jasmin would enter, and he himself would go to roost for a couple of hours. Then would come the time for his great enterprise.

He had been thus quietly engaged with his second pipe for a space of five or six minutes, when, finding that it did not draw to his mind, he sat up with the view of ascertaining what was the matter with it. In the act of opening his knife, he turned his eyes unthinkingly on M. Platzoff. In the face of the silent man sitting opposite to him there was something that caused his own face to blanch in a moment, as though he had seen some unmentionable horror. He rose to his feet as though moved by some invisible agency. Great beads of sweat burst out on his brow; his lips turned blue; in his eyes was a terror unspeakable. He staggered forward with a groan, and lifted the cold hand that would never grasp his again.

"Great heaven! I have killed him!"

He sank on his knees, and buried his face in his hands. He knew as well as if twenty doctors had told him so, that M. Paul Platzoff, of Bon Repos, was dead. On his forehead was stamped the Great Angel's ineffaceable seal. Death had whispered in his ears, and he was deaf for ever.

That one minute which Ducie spent on his knees was, perhaps, the bitterest of his life. What his feelings were he himself could not have told. "As heaven is my witness, I did not intend to do this thing!" he exclaimed aloud, as he rose to his feet.

Then, in spite of the certainty which possessed him that Platzoff was beyond all earthly aid, he bared one of the Russian's arms, and pricked a vein with his penknife. But no blood followed, and with

another groan Ducie let go the fingers that were already growing cold and stiff.

His next impulse was to ring for assistance. But in the very act of pulling the bell-rope he paused. For a minute or two the very existence of such a bauble as the Hara Diamond had passed entirely out of his thoughts. But as his fingers touched the rope, there came a whisper in his ear: "Now or never the Diamond must become yours!" He paused, and sat down for a moment to think.

Platzoff was gone past recovery. Of all men living he, Ducie, was probably the only one to whom the existence of the Diamond was known; or, at least, the place where it was hidden. Dead men tell no tales. If he were to make the Diamond his—and had he not a right to do so, having paid such a tremendous price for it—who in all the wide world would be one bit the wiser? If, on the contrary, he were to leave it untouched, it might remain undiscovered in its dark home for centuries, perhaps even till the end of time. Or if Platzoff's friend, Signor Lampini, were sufficiently instructed where to find it, of what use would it be to him except as a means for the propagation of red-hot revolutionary ideas, among which, for aught he knew to the contrary, assassination might be looked upon as a cardinal virtue? He would be worse than a fool not to seize the last chance that would ever be offered him of making the precious gem his own for ever.

Once more he looked at his watch. It wanted exactly a quarter to twelve. He had fifteen clear minutes that he could call his own, and not one minute more. No suspicion would attach to him with regard to the death of Platzoff; he felt no uneasiness on that score. But after that event should be discovered, the pass-key would be claimed by Cleon, and all access to the rooms denied him. Now or never was his time.

He hesitated no longer. With a shudder he put his hand into the dead man's pocket, and drew forth the silver key. It was the work of a moment to light the little hand-lamp, and pass forward into the library. Then he went down on his knees to look for the marks he had made on the carpet which were to point out to him the exact position of the secret door. Having found them, together with an almost invisible scratch which he had made on a particular part of the polished panelling of the bookcase, he was guided at once to the spring by which the secret door was acted upon, and in another moment the narrow stone staircase opened darkly at his feet. Down the stairs he went without pause or hesitation, carrying the lighted lamp in one hand and the pass-key in the other. The door at the bottom of the staircase opened without difficulty, and he found himself in the low vaulted chamber at the further end of which was the door that opened into the rock. The second door was passed as readily as the first, and before him appeared the narrow passage that

led to the cavern. To-night the cold moist atmosphere of the place struck upon him with a chill that made him shudder. He had trodden that passage but once before, and then it was in company with the man who now lay cold and dead in the room above. He gave a backward glance over his shoulder, half expecting to see the shade of Platzoff following silently in his footsteps. But there was nothing save his own distorted shadow dogging him like some monster at once ugly and grotesque. With a sneer at his own timidity, he entered the passage in the rock. In three minutes more the great prize would be his.

Slowly and cautiously he threaded the tortuous pathway that led to the heart of the hill. He reached the end of it in safety, and the cavern loomed dim and vast before him. He paused for a moment, and held the lamp high above his head. There, fixed in the middle of the sandy floor he could just make out the vague outlines of the Indian idol. The great gem that flashed in its forehead caught a ray from the feeble lamp held by Ducie, and flung it back intensified a thousandfold. Ducie saw the flash, and his breath came thick and fast.

He advanced one step—a second. Then, before he knew what had happened, he found himself stretched on the floor of the cave and in utter darkness. He had stumbled over some inequality in the floor, and had dropped his lamp in falling. Bruised and bleeding, and with a curse on his lips, he rose to his feet.

The predicament in which he now found himself was anything but a pleasant one. That he could find the idol even in the dark, and make himself master of the Diamond, he did not doubt. But the question was, whether, if he wandered so far away from the narrow passage by which access was had to the cavern, he could find it again, and so get back to the library before the clock struck twelve. If that could be done all might yet be well. If it could not be done —but he would not stop to argue the point. He would make a bold dash for the Diamond. He would risk everything in one final throw, and trust that the good fortune which had so far befriended his enterprise would not desert him in this great crisis of his fate.

A few seconds sufficed for him to weave these thoughts in his brain, and almost before he had decided on what he would do he was advancing deeper into the cavern; advancing slowly, step by step, with outstretched arms, in the direction of the idol. By the light of his lamp he had noted its position, and now that he was in the dark he went to it nearly in a straight line. Suddenly it seemed as though the idol had risen noiselessly from the ground. The palm of his left hand smote its flat cold forehead. He lost not an instant in feeling for the Diamond. The moment his fingers touched it he thrilled from head to foot.

The Diamond was held in its place in the forehead of the idol by a small gold clasp which worked in the hollow of the skull. It occu-

pied Ducie some three or four minutes, first to find the clasp and afterwards to unfasten it. At length he succeeded in opening it, and the Diamond dropped into his palm. His own at last!

With a great sigh of relief and thankfulness he drew back his arm, and having first kissed the gem, he put it carefully away into a safe pocket, and then turned to retrace his steps. Taking the nose of the idol as his starting-point, he calculated that a straight line from it to the wall of the cavern would not land him very wide of the entrance. But the difficulty was to keep a straight line in the dark, and the darkness of the cavern was something that might almost be felt. But there was no time for hesitation. If midnight had not struck already it must be close on the point of doing so. The delay of a single minute might be the cause of his discovery either by Cleon or Jasmin. What the result would be in such a case he did not pause to ask himself. Instead, he set himself with his back to the face of the idol and stepped out slow and steady for the side of the cave.

He had got about half way across the intervening space when a sound fell on his ear that brought him on the instant to a dead stand. It was the noise made by some one descending the stone stairs that led into the vaulted room. All had been discovered, then! The death of Platzoff, the secret door standing wide open, and his, Ducie's, disappearance. The intruder must be either Cleon or Jasmin. Was either of them aware of the existence of the Diamond, and that it had been hidden in the cave? If not, then his presence there could be easily excused on the score of simple curiosity to see so strange a place. If they knew of the existence of the Diamond, they would suspect at once that he had taken it, and would doubtless try to dispossess him of it by force. Well: they should not take it from him without taking his life also: on that point he was fully determined. Presently a thin ray of light which cut the darkness like a sword, shone through the narrow entrance to the cave. It broadened and brightened quickly. As it drew nearer, Captain Ducie advanced to meet it. His face was pale, but very set and determined. His eyes shone from under his heavy brows with a light that boded no good to the intruder, whoever he might be. He was not left long in doubt. Another half-minute brought into view the gaunt figure of Cleon, newly-risen from his sick-bed. With haggard face and bloodshot eyes, and with a snarl of the lips that showed his long narrow teeth, the mulatto advanced slowly and warily. In one hand he carried a lamp, held high above his head; in the other a gleaming dagger. Ducie advanced towards him haughtily, with folded arms. As Cleon emerged from the entrance into the cave, his eyes fell on the Captain's tall figure. He smiled a ghastly smile, and slowly nodded his head twice.

"Thief and villain! I have found you at last," he said. "Your heart's blood shall dye the floor of this cave."

He set down his lamp on a projection of the rock, and deliberately turned back the cuffs of his coat. Captain Ducie said never a word in reply, but kept his eyes fixed unswervingly on Cleon as he would have done on a tiger or other beast of prey. He was without a defensive weapon of any kind, and was obliged to trust to the quickness of his eye and the strength of his muscles for safety in the coming attack.

Cleon's onslaught was exactly like that of a wild beast. It was a yell and a spring, and it would in all probability have been fatal to Ducie had not the latter been fully prepared for something of the kind. But the very instant Cleon sprang at his throat, out went Ducie's right arm, straight and true, like a sledge hammer, full in the mulatto's face. Cleon dropped before it as though he had been shot through the brain. But next instant he was on his feet again, his face streaked with blood, and now looking more ghastly than before. He said something Ducie could not understand, but if murder ever lurked in a man's eyes, it peeped out of the mulatto's at that moment. He was not at all daunted by his mishap: only rendered more wary. He made several feints and false moves before he ventured on a second dash at the Captain. At last he thought he saw his chance, and in the twinkling of an eye he had struck his dagger into the Captain's shoulder. He had aimed at the heart, but his enemy had proved too quick for him. His dagger pricked into Ducie's shoulder, and Ducie's arms went round him like a vice. The mulatto was active and sinewy, but in a close struggle he was no match for the great strength of his opponent. His arms were pinned to his sides, but his head was at liberty, and with his long sharp teeth he fastened on Ducie's cheek and bit it through. This roused Ducie's blood as half-a-dozen pricks with the dagger could not have done. Lifting Cleon bodily up, he swung him once round and then dashed him with all his might against the side of the cave. The mulatto rebounded from the rock, and came to the floor with a dull, heavy thud. He groaned twice, and then all was still except the heavy beating of Ducie's heart.

Ducie bent over the body for a moment. "His fate be on his own head!" he muttered. Then, having made sure that the Diamond was still safe in his possession, he took up the lamp and passed out of the cave. He shut and locked the two doors behind him; and when he got back to the library he also closed the secret door through the bookcase. As he passed through the smoke-room he gave one hasty, shuddering glance at the dead body of Platzoff. The half-open eyes seemed to fix him with a look of terrible reproach. He fancied that he saw the pallid lips move. "Ingrate!" they seemed to say, "was it for this I took thee to my bosom and called thee friend?"

Ducie put his hand to his eyes and strode on. He found the door that led into the corridor half-open, as it had probably been left by Cleon in the horror of the sudden discovery he had made on

entering the smoke-room. Ducie closed it carefully behind him. That door locked up a double secret, and it behoved him to get clear away from Bon Repos before it could be brought to light. He carried his treasure with him, and that would compensate for everything.

The moment he turned into the corridor to go towards his own rooms he began to feel faint from loss of blood. The first great excitement was over, and now his wounds began to make themselves felt. Great heavens! if he were to lose his senses at such a critical moment and be found by the servants! They would perceive that he was wounded, and would probably strip him, and then how would it fare with the Diamond? Just as this thought was in his mind, Jasmin came suddenly round a corner and started back in alarm at sight of his pale face all streaked with blood.

"Sir—Captain Ducie—what is the matter? Are you wounded?" he cried.

"A slight accident—a mere scratch," gasped the Captain. "Lend me your arm as far as my room; and—and don't leave me yet awhile."

The first message sent by the telegraph clerk at Oxenholme station when he went on duty next morning was as under:—

"From J. M., Windermere, to Solomon Madgin, Eastbury, Midlandshire.—Address no more letters to B. R. till you hear from me again. A grand fracas. The Captain and I are on our way to town. Unless I am greatly mistaken, we carry the G. H. D. with us."

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### MADGIN JUNIOR'S THIRD REPORT.

"Button's Hotel, St. Helier, Jersey.

"My dear Dad,—My telegram from Oxenholme, followed by my brief note from London, will have prepared you in part for the strange events that have happened since the date of my last report. I now purpose giving you, as succinctly as possible, a narrative of those events from the point where my last report broke off. You will then understand how it happens that my present communication is dated from this pleasant little isle.

"After the conclusion of Report No. 2, nothing of consequence happened for a few days—nothing that would allow me to imagine that the discovery of the secret door in the library would further our views in any way. M. Platzoff was confined to his bed for a couple of days after the fit in which I found him. After that time he got up as usual, and everything at Bon Repos went on as before. Captain Ducie was still with us. I understood from Cleon that he had been invited by M. Platzoff to extend his visit. The health of Cleon kept

improving from day to day, and about a week after M. Platzoff's sudden attack he announced to me that from that date he would resume those personal duties about his master which during his illness had been delegated to me. Then farewell to my last chance of ever seeing the Great Diamond, I said to myself when he told me.

"And truly, at that moment I despaired utterly of ever advancing one step nearer the object that had brought me to Bon Repos. I was on the point of giving notice there and then of my intention to leave, and of writing you by the next post to inform you of what I had done. Besides, I was getting tired of my occupation—tired of Bon Repos and all in it. I began to hanker after my old way of life, in which a fictitious character is never assumed for more than four hours at a stretch. I had been acting the part of valet for more weeks than I cared to count, and I was heartily tired of the assumption. However, on second thoughts, I determined to delay giving notice for another week. I would wait seven more days, and if nothing turned up during that time to further our views, I decided that I would throw up the situation without further delay and go back to town. Never had the hunt after the Hara Diamond seemed to me a more wildgoose affair than it did at that moment.

"It was in the afternoon that Cleon spoke to me. The evening was to be devoted by M. Platzoff to drashkil-smoking—Cleon had been preparing a fresh supply of the drug that very morning—and Cleon's resumption of his duties was to commence at midnight, at which hour M. Platzoff would doubtless require carrying to bed, and the mulatto decided that that duty should be performed by himself.

"Cleon had not yet felt himself well enough to resume his custom, interrupted by illness, of going out every evening to smoke a pipe with the landlord of the village inn. (Both the house and the landlord will be well remembered by you.) This evening he had invited me into his little sitting-room to smoke a cigar and join him over a glass of grog—a most unusual condescension on his part. We were still sitting over our tumblers when the timepiece chimed twelve. Cleon rose at once. 'Had you not better let me go to-night?' I said. 'You are far from strong yet, and M. Platzoff will most probably want carrying to bed.'

"'No, no,' he said, 'I will go myself. I feel quite equal to the task. Await my return here, and we will have one more weed before parting for the night.'

"He went, and I lighted a fresh cigar. I think he must have been gone about ten minutes when he came back all in a hurry. His face was livid, but whether from fear or some other emotion I could not tell. I started to my feet and was about to question him, but he motioned me back. 'Ask no questions,' he said, 'and do not stir from this place till I come back—unless,' he added as a second thought, 'unless you hear M. Platzoff's bell. In that case come without a moment's delay.'

"I saw he was in no mood to be questioned, so I sat down quietly and resumed my cigar. From a number of weapons that hung on the wall over his mantelpiece he selected a long and ugly-looking Malay creese. He felt its point with a grim smile, whispering something to himself as he did so, and then he hurriedly left the room.

"Now, it was all very well for Master Cleon to tell me to sit still and await his return. I had no intention of doing anything of the kind. I had a deeper interest in all that happened under that roof than he suspected.

"When he had been gone about a minute and a half, I laid down my cigar and quietly followed him down the long corridor leading to M. Platzoff's rooms. I had on the thin slippers which I usually wore in the house. M. Platzoff liked all the arrangements at Bon Repos to be as noiseless as possible.

"The corrider ends in a landing: on this landing are several doors that open into different rooms, one of them being the door that gives access to M. Platzoff's private suite. The corridor and the landing were both in darkness.

"Much to my astonishment, on approaching M. Platzoff's door, I saw by the stream of light that poured from it that it was only partially closed. I drew near on tiptoe and listened, ready at the slightest sound of an approaching footstep to vanish into one of the empty rooms on the opposite side of the landing. But no sound of any kind broke the death-like silence. I listened till I was tired of listening, and then I ventured to push open the door a few inches further, and look in. The room was lighted as usual, and was filled with the faint, sickly odour of drashkil, to which, by this time, I had become accustomed. But Cleon was not there. There, however, was M. Platzoff, not half sitting, half reclining, on the divan, as was his custom when in one of his opium sleeps, but stretched out at full length on the cushions.

"He lay with his eyes half open, and at the first glance it seemed to me that he was watching me in that quiet, cynical way that I knew so well, and I started like one suddenly detected in the commission of some great offence. A second glance showed me that in those half-open eyes there was no light nor knowledge of earthly things. I thought that he had been taken with another fit, and, without further hesitation, I pushed open the door and went in.

"I took the inanimate body up in my arms, and was about to carry it to bed, when something in the fall of the limbs and the expression of the face struck a sudden chill to my heart, and I laid it gently down again. I sought for the pulse, but could not find it; I laid my hand on the heart, but it was still.

"M. Platzoff was stone-dead!

"How or by what means his fate had come thus suddenly upon him I had no means of judging. Poor Platzoff! At that moment I could not help feeling sorry for him. But presently came the

thought—where is Cleon? and for what purpose did he fetch that dagger from his room? There were no tokens of murder about the dead man: he seemed to have died as calmly as an infant might have done.

"I pressed forward into the bedroom, which, as usual, was lighted up by a pair of wax candles. I took one of these and went onward into the library. I could scarcely believe my eyes when I saw the secret door in the book-case standing wide open. It opened on to a steep and narrow staircase, at the bottom of which was another door, also open. Further than that the faint light of my candle would not penetrate.

"'Does this staircase lead to the hiding-place of the Diamond?' was the question that flashed across my mind. Now or never was the time to answer it. But to venture down that dismal staircase into the unknown depths beyond was a task I did not care for. Suppose that, while I were down there, someone were to come and lock me up. I might scream and call for help till I died, yet never be heard by living man. Besides, after all, the Diamond might not be hidden there. The game was not worth the candle.

"I turned to go back, but at that moment the silence was shivered by a yell so utterly fiendish and unlike anything I had ever heard before, that my blood chilled at the sound, and all the stories tha had ever heard or read of Indian cunning and ferocity came rushing into my mind.

"I stood motionless, with the candle still in my hand, listening for a repetition of the terrible cry. But none came. Instead, in a little while I heard the noise of approaching footsteps. Then indeed I fled. Anxious as I was to know the meaning of what I had seen and heard, I had no desire to risk my life for the sake of gratifying my curiosity.

"Leaving my candle where I had found it, I passed quickly through the suite of rooms, and did not halt till I reached the dark corridor outside. Here I waited and listened till I heard the footsteps coming through the rooms. Then I turned up the corridor, waited behind the first angle, and watched to see who should come out of the smoke-room. I expected to see none other than Cleon. Instead, I saw Ducie come staggering out, carrying a small lighted lamp in his hand, and having his face all smeared with blood. Some weird tragedy had just been enacted, and I should not have been my father's son if I had not wanted to get to the bottom of it.

"I retired a few paces, and then, calculating my time, I stepped briskly forward as Ducie came up the corridor. We met face to face at the corner, and we both started back in mutual surprise. There was a wildness in the Captain's eyes, and he looked as if he were about to faint.

"'Sir! Captain Ducie!' I exclaimed, 'what is the matter? Are you wounded?'

"'A slight accident, that's all: a mere scratch,' he gasped out. 'Lend me your arm as far as my room.'

"I assisted him to his dressing-room, and once there, he sank down on the sofa with a deep sigh.

"'Get me some brandy,' he whispered. 'Before you go, let me tell you,' he added, 'that should I faint you must on no account summon any further assistance, neither must you remove any of my clothes. Bear those two points in mind, and also that you are not to leave me, nor let anyone else approach me till I come round. Now go, and get back as quickly as possible.'

"I had only to go as far as Cleon's room for what I wanted. I found the room just as I had left it. Cleon had not yet returned. 'Would he ever return?' was the question I now asked myself. Had there not been some terrible encounter between him and Ducie, and had not the mulatto had the worst of it? Yet why should there be any encounter between the two, if it were not to determine which of them should obtain possession of the Diamond?

"That the death of M. Platzoff was known to both of them could not be doubted. Supposing, then, that the existence of the Diamond, and the place where it was hidden, were equally well known, what more likely than that there should be a struggle between the two, ending fatally for one of them, for possession of the Diamond? Supposing Captain Ducie to have been the victor in such an encounter, was it at all unlikely that the Diamond was now about his person? Such a supposition would account reasonably enough for the curious injunctions he laid upon me just before I quitted his room.

"Full of this great thought, I hurried back with the brandy. True enough, the Captain had fainted. He lay at full length on the sofa, with not an atom of sense left in him. But the singularity of the thing lay in the fact that Captain Ducie's right hand was deeply buried inside his vest, and there grasped some small substance—I could not tell what—with a tenacity that could not have been surpassed had his hand not been opened for twenty years. So much I discovered before I proceeded to apply any of the remedies usual on such occasions. After a few minutes he came to his senses sufficiently to know where he was and what I was about. But before his mind had become quite clear on all points, he withdrew his clenched hand from his waistcoat, stared at it wonderingly for a second or two, but without opening it; then like a flash it seemed to come across his mind what was hidden there, and with a deep 'Ha!' he thrust back his hand, only to withdraw it, open and empty, half a minute later. 'He has hidden away the Diamond in some inner pocket,' I said to myself. From that moment I never doubted that the wondrous gem was in his possession, and I could not help admiring the cool patience and the indomitable pluck he must have displayed before he could call it his own. All the same,

I determined to try all I knew to cause it to change hands once more.

"The brandy revived Captain Ducie, and in a few minutes he was able to sit up and tell me what he wanted. He told me that he had been wounded accidentally in the shoulder, and bade me assist him off with his coat and vest. The coat he flung carelessly aside. The vest he doubled up, laid it on the sofa, and sat down on it. Then I cut open his shirt and laid bare the wound on his shoulder. It was not very deep, but there had been a good deal of hemorrhage. With the coolness and knowledge of an old campaigner the Captain instructed me how to bathe the wound and dress it with some salve which he produced from his dressing-case. Then he put on some clean linen, washed the smears from his face, hid the ugly gash in his cheek with a strip of court-plaster, and dressed. All this was done with a silence and celerity that astonished me.

"'So far, so good,' said Captain Ducie. 'I want you next to pack my small portmanteau. Put into it my dressing-case and all my papers, and as many of my clothes as it will hold. Then go and pack up a few things of your own. I want you to go with me, and in ten minutes I shall expect you to be ready to start.'

"I made some faint objections on the score of leaving M. Platzoff in such an unceremonious way.

"'I will take the entire responsibility on my own shoulders,' he said. 'Your excuses to M. Platzoff shall be made by me. You have nothing to fear on that score. As my shoulder is now, it is quite impossible for me to go up to town alone. You need only be away forty-eight hours, and I shall not forget to remunerate you for your trouble.'

"In ten minutes I was ready to start. 'If Captain Ducie has got the Diamond about him, as I fully believe he has,' I said to myself, "then is my occupation at Bon Repos gone, and I care not if I never see the place again. My duty is evidently to accompany the gallant Captain.'

"When I had packed my own little valise, I stole quietly into Cleon's room. It was still empty: the mulatto had not returned. Then I went softly down the corridor, pushed open the door of the smoke-room and looked in. No hand had touched the body of M. Platzoff since I left it last. I whispered 'Farewell,' covered up the white face, and left the room. I had one thing more to do. Taking a lighted candle in my hand, I went into the little gallery that opens out of the drawing-room. In this gallery were several cases containing old coins, old china, rare fossils, and various other curiosities, natural and artificial. It was one of these curiosities that I was in quest of. I knew where the key was kept that opened the cases. I got it and opened the case in which lay the object I was in search of. This object, to all appearance, was nothing more than a bit of green glass, except that its shape was rather uncommon. There was

a small label near it, and this label I had one day been at the trouble of deciphering. The writing was so minute as almost to require a magnifying glass to read it by. After much difficulty I had succeeded in making out these words:

"'Model in paste of the H. D. by Bertolini, of Paris.'

"M. Platzoff was dead: Cleon, for aught I knew to the contrary, was dead too. I was about to leave Bon Repos for ever—to leave it with the man who had stolen the genuine Diamond from the man who had stolen it from its rightful owner. Why should not I take possession of the paste Diamond? As a simple curiosity it might be a gratification to Lady C. to possess it. More than that: it seemed to me not impossible that certain eventualities might arise in which the possession of an exact model of the Diamond might be of service to us. Anyhow, I dropped it quietly into my pocket."

*(To be continued.)*

## THINGS UNSEEN.

If the kindly deeds they do—
  They whose lives are wisely spent—
Into radiant blossoms grew
  Wheresoe'er their footsteps went,
Wealth of bloom would surely grace
Many a dark unlikely place.

If the words that comforted
  Lonely waif or erring wight
Changed, as they were softly said,
  Into rays of purest light,
Joy would live in gloomy walls,
Where no earthly sunshine falls.

But there are—through sin's offence—
  Things we pass unheeded by;
Hidden from our grosser sense,
  Lovely in the Master's eye.
So we fight with shadows grim,
Knowing all is plain to Him.

SYDNEY GREY.

# A YELLOW ROSE.

## I.

MISS MARY ANNE! I had never known her by any other name. She was the daughter of "old Mrs Bolton," a commanding widow of our town, who had ruled her for fifty years with a rod of iron, and then had died suddenly, inflicting a nervous shock from which she had hardly, two years later, recovered. She was still tremulous at the least agitation, her colour coming and going like the delicate tints of a girl. Strange to say, much of a girl remained in her; partly because she had never, throughout nearly half-a-century, thrown off her girlhood's trammels; but partly also because her heart was so young.

To me, indeed, she seemed an embodied miracle, growing younger as other people grew in years. For I had thought her an antique lady, when, at five, I sat on her knee to be fed with barley-sugar; and now, at twenty, in my Girton long vacation, I regarded her from the standpoint of an elder sister.

I suppose that, notwithstanding our hard modern life, the same chords lie dumb within us as, in past generations, made sweet music to the touch of L. E. L., of "Birthday Keepsakes," bound in watered silk, and the like. I was conscious of muffled responses from some such hidden powers, when Miss Mary Anne sat at her old flat-topped piano, and sang snatches of by-gone melodies—bits here and there—which had taken her fancy when it was really—in point of time, as we reckon it—young, in a voice still sweet and clear. After a hard day of reading—I was too busy to waste my vacation—I would run over to her neat little room, and lie back in her chintz-covered arm-chair, listening and watching her the while: the delicate face, with its remains of a fair pink and white complexion; the blonde hair, with auburn threads untouched by white, and arranged in two full loops on either temple; the pointed nose, a little too long; the mobile mouth, uttering the strains; the large, liquid grey eyes, looking straight before her as she sang, over the piano and away—away from me, from the faded furniture left by old Mrs. Bolton, from everything present and material, into some wide visionary world of the far past.

"You have had a history, Miss Mary Anne! I know it. I wish you would tell it to me," I said, on one of these occasions, when her song had ceased, but her long white hands still wandered over the yellow keys.

That sudden bloom flushed her cheeks.

"A history—my dear?"

"It's too absurd to call me your dear! I feel more like your

grandmother, or your great aunt. Why, Miss Mary Anne, I'm a hard, worldly-wise old veteran, compared with you! I could no more go off into soft, sweet dreams—I don't know what else to call them—like yours, than I could—conjure up Miss Byron's cedar parlour! If you really have had a history—and you have, I'm sure—you might tell me, if only to prove that there *is* such a thing as romance. I've heard of such a thing, of course, but I've never seen it. And you know the tendency of the age I've been born and bred in is rather to doubt the existence of things one can't see."

"Ah, my dear!" repeated Miss Mary Anne, with a faint smile, still playing subdued arpeggios, "what would become of me if I had such doubts? To me those things are the life; the seen things are the shadow. But you young creatures, nowadays—there is certainly a strange difference! In my young time, we were most of us full of romance. At least, so I suppose. I know I was. Only too full of it. I imagined too much; my ideals were too high for this world. And yet, they were born in me. If no truth were in them, why, I have often thought, should a merciful Creator —— But I shall bore you, my bright child. Come into the garden; it is cool enough now to water my lilies."

"You sha'n't turn me off so, Miss Mary Anne. I'll get that history out of you yet. It is laid up in a spiritual jar of pot-pourri, I know, in some fragrant inward chamber."

She smiled again; and again I saw the rose-flush. But my irreverent touch was too rough for her tender mind. She tied the flapping strings of her broad-brimmed hat below her chin, and went out through the low French window to her flowers.

Her faithful maid-of-all-work was waiting upon the little grass plat. They did not need my help; and gardening was not in my line. I remained idly ensconced in the deep chair, my curious eyes roving around me. Was there anything here which might throw light upon that possible history? A number of black silhouettes, arranged with mathematical precision, had hung, from a date long preceding my memory, in a recess above an ancient oak table. I knew each profile by heart; yet, possessed by this new idea, I crossed the room to study them afresh.

No! not one could possibly be connected with those sweet yet pensive dreams. Some were pudgy, some peaky, some pig-tailed. My doubts as to romance in real life gathered substance as I gazed.

"How would Mr. Galton account for Miss Mary Anne, if he could see these specimens of her ancestry?" I mused, my hand resting on the old table. That old table was a special favourite; the date, 1600, was carved upon it, and Miss Mary Anne regarded it with gentle pride. For the first time, as I turned disgusted from the silhouettes, I saw that this table possessed a drawer. It had no handle, but the outline was discernible on one side, under the heavily-carved ledge.

"How strange that I never noticed it before! Or is it a sham?" I pulled, and the drawer opened.

Stiffly, and as if long years had rolled since it was opened last. But it was empty—or, no! what was this, buried far back in its depths?

A withered flower, with a slip of old paper stuck in a faded ribbon knotted round its stalk. I took it in my hand, very carefully. The petals were dried and discoloured. It had been a rose, I saw, long ago.

The slip of paper had three words upon it. The ink had faded too; but the handwriting was clear and strong.

"'*For my Mary.*'" Those were the words; nothing more.

"For 'my Mary!'" I read them again. Somehow they fascinated me.

"My Mary!" Who was she? And whose Mary?

By some half-defined impulse, I replaced the flower, and pushed back the drawer, with its secret, as a somewhat thin and highly-pitched, yet gentle voice—the voice of Miss Mary Anne—called from the garden.

## II.

On the first day of the Christmas vacation, when once more I returned from Girton, I was told that Miss Mary Anne had been seriously ill. She had caught a cold, resulting in some affection of the lungs; she was still very weak and very low—unaccountably low.

"But Miss Mary Anne is always unlike other people—so very unsociable, don't you know, dear? One can't well do anything to help her," said my informant.

I answered nothing; but after dinner, the moon having risen, I wrapped myself in my furs, and sped away to the little house round the corner, where Miss Mary Anne resided. It was her own house, descended from old Mrs. Bolton, who had come to it some years before my birth: somewhat prim, but peaceful, standing back from the road, in its little garden, where Miss Mary Anne assiduously nursed her flowers. I opened the door for myself, as was my custom, and peeped into the familiar parlour. I had expected a warm greeting, and was taken aback to find the room empty and fireless. Jane had not drawn down the blinds; the moonbeams were streaming on the furniture. Something, I saw at a glance, was missing—the old oak table! The uninteresting profiles remained faithful at their posts; below them a cane-seated chair stood, with stiff back, against the wall. I peered from corner to corner, vainly hoping that the table had been placed elsewhere. But it was gone; and the rest of the room, which had long grown shabby, looked strangely insignificant without it.

After a few moments, I stole upstairs, and found my way to Miss

Mary Anne's bedroom. The fire was there instead; she sat beside it, in a great arm-chair, where I well remembered old Mrs. Bolton, during some brief illness, installed, looking very majestic and imperious, with a huge cap and stony eyes. Very different was the form installed there now; fragile and shrinking: the great chair seemed to swallow it up. I had disturbed Miss Mary Anne in a dream! Her dressing-gown of faded blue flannel became her transparent skin; her hair was arranged as usual in its blonde loops; her liquid eyes were gazing, gazing into the fire. Her handkerchief, wet and crumpled, lay on her knee; a tear was slowly rolling down her thin, pink cheek.

She turned to me at first with a blank stare, as if I belonged to her dream.

"Why, Miss Mary Anne, don't you know me? And how is it that you can't get up your strength? I felt I must come to you at once—but I never meant to make you cry, dear! You must cheer up now that I am at home, and let me help you. I feel more like your grandmother than ever I did!"

"You funny child," said Miss Mary Anne hoarsely; and then she coughed and choked, struggling between laughter and tears. "It will do me good to see you sometimes. Though as to helping me—only one thing can help me now, Dorothy dear."

"I know what you mean; but you sha'n't have it. You're not going to die yet; I sha'n't let you. And you must tell me all about it—your trouble, I mean, for I can see how you've been fretting. Dear Miss Mary Anne, do, do tell me! Let me at least try to help."

I was kneeling beside her now, my arms encircling the frail little form; and I really did feel like her grandmother—a great, strong, ferocious kind of grandmother, ready to frighten away anyone and anything which could grieve her, and to take her part through thick and thin, happen what might.

After a while I coaxed her till she did confide the trouble which I could see, from the first, was on her mind. Ever since her mother's death, I found, she had concealed a painful secret, which had disturbed her rest by night and her peace by day. The house and garden had been surreptitiously mortgaged, some years previously, by old Mrs. Bolton, who was very extravagant in her time; an annuity from which she had paid the interest had ceased at her death, and the burden of the whole had been left upon poor, tremulous, unprepared Miss Mary Anne.

"I could not think at first what to do, my dear. It was such a sudden blow; and I had nobody to advise me. One does not like, you know, to publish one's private affairs—especially money affairs. Money difficulties are considered so disgraceful! I could not bear that anyone should blame poor mamma. Mr. Prigall, her man of business, wanted to foreclose; but at length I persuaded him to

spare me. He allowed me to stay on condition of the interest being punctually paid. I managed it fairly well, though it was hard work, up to last June; but then, somehow, the full amount was not forthcoming. I did scrape it together afterwards; Mr. Prigall had every penny in August. But he wrote me such an alarming letter, my dear, that ——"

Her voice broke off in a quiver. She swallowed hard, wiped two new tears away, and commanded herself.

"I was frightened, naturally, when the time drew near once more. Mr. Prigall said that he should feel it his duty to foreclose if the interest were more than seven days late in future. Mr. Prigall is very peremptory, my dear. You would not wonder, if you knew him, that I—— poor mamma, you see, managed everything in her lifetime. I felt so desolate; and I cannot bear disgrace—that is the one thing most terrible."

"There is no disgrace in the matter — none possible," I cried hotly.

"I feel it a disgrace, my dear, when one can't pay one's debts. I have been most careful, ever since dear mamma died, to pay ready money at the shops. That keeps me a little short, of course, and makes the interest to the day more difficult. And, this time, there was my illness; some extras were quite unavoidable; and the doctor's bill is coming, you know. I didn't want to have him; but Jane said, 'it 'uld be downright murder, else'—so what could I do? There's the sixth Commandment, I daren't break that, you see, though the life is only my own. The Commandments do clash sometimes; there's that other: 'Owe no man anything.'"

And again Miss Mary Anne paused to dry helpless tears.

"Never mind, dear, dear Miss Mary Anne. Go on and tell me."

"Your sympathy is certainly comforting, Dorothy, my dear. I've been shut up alone, you see, so long. Well, this time, when the day drew near — the fifteenth of December — the money was not made up; and—there was no help for it—I was obliged—oh, my dear, if I were downstairs in the sitting-room, you would know without my telling you."

"I did look into the sitting-room, Miss Mary Anne. I can guess. You sold the oak table."

"The dear, precious oak table," said Miss Mary Anne, making now no effort to restrain her weeping; "my dear, you can't tell what it cost me. I remembered it all my life; we brought it from dear Riverdale, our old home—my father, you know, was the clergyman —years and years before your parents were even married. The associations——but I could not help it. 'They took joyfully the spoiling of their goods,' that text — I say it over and over, when — you see, my dear, all the rest of the furniture is included in the mortgage; every single thing — the oak table excepted; dear mamma could not bear to mortgage that. And that—the one thing she

treasured most, and planned to keep—is the one which has had to go. How she would blame me! but I could not help it, indeed. She little knows, up there—where all is so happy—how I have striven down here. But surely she would forgive me, if she did know, Dorothy—dear mamma would surely forgive me, if she knew."

"Especially since the whole affair was dear mamma's fault," I muttered *sotto voce*. "Of course she would, Miss Mary Anne," I added aloud. "You are weak from your long illness, or you would see things differently. Now, look here. I've brought you a partridge, and a mould of Swiss cream, which nobody touched at dinner. I thought you might fancy them; and I shall run down to Jane, and in five minutes you'll see such a spread!"

She tried feebly to represent herself as a kind of fatted cow, fed to repletion; but I paid no heed, and in a little while—Jane a willing and delighted assistant—I saw her, to my relief, really enjoying a satisfactory meal.

III.

THE good food had its effect. She seemed already stronger when afterwards, Jane having removed the dishes, she leant back, as before in her chair.

"What are you thinking about, Miss Mary Anne?" I asked audaciously, from my stool at her feet. "Something pleasant, now; I can see by the change in your face."

For the dreamy peace by which, upon the whole, that young old face was characterised, had returned. And here again was the girlish flush.

"Pleasant, my dear? Well, hardly painful—and yet—I was thinking, Dorothy, of what might have been."

"There! I knew you had a history! Oh, Miss Mary Anne! the door of that inward chamber is just ajar for a few moments. It will close up again, directly; do please let me first have one peep. I will never tell—indeed."

"Well, it might teach you a lesson, my child. Though, after all ——. I ought to regret my conduct, perhaps; but I can't say altogether that I do. I should have been happier, of course, as to this world; but I should not have been satisfied. In a way, I doubt even about the happiness—no one knows what might have followed. To be sure, I should have been provided for. But I often think that if I find—when we meet again in Paradise—if I find —— Oh, that will make up for all!"

"Miss Mary Anne, you are talking in complete enigmas. I can't understand you one bit. Do have pity on me, and descend, for once, to the speech of our everyday world."

"Well, my dear, I'll try. But there is nothing much, after all. You'll only be disappointed. It is only that once, long ago ——"

"Oh, how long?"

"You may calculate, if you like. I was barely twenty-one when we parted, and he was twenty-four. We were engaged, my dear—for three years—when I lived in my old home, Riverdale. He was the Squire's son—a younger son, or it would hardly have been allowed. I have never seen anyone like him, all this long time. He was tall and fair and pale, with such steadfast eyes! Very strong, and yet so tender and gentle. I don't see the kind of love, nowadays, which seemed to me the only love then. There is so little reverence now. As for me, I fear I adored him ——"

"Miss Mary Anne, I put it to your sense of justice. How could any girl be expected to adore any young men about here?"

"Well, well, my dear. He was one in a thousand certainly. And to think that he loved me! I sometimes look in the glass, Dorothy, and say to myself, 'What! he really loved me? This uninteresting person, —me?' You may laugh, but I do, indeed. I'm thinking about him still, nearly all day. The sharp pain is over now. There's only just an aching, quite bearable — generally, at least. And then — in Paradise."

"Miss Mary Anne, is he dead?" I asked softly.

"I don't know, my dear. I have never tried to find out. Somehow, after we parted, I felt that I would rather know nothing more about the earthly particulars—I could not bear it, severed as we were. I liked best to keep his vision in my heart, and shut it up there, just as it used to be, and cherish it in my own way."

"But did he disappoint you? or what?"

"He did disappoint me, most sorely; and yet—I dare say you won't understand. I have never expected anyone to understand. That is why I have kept it so secret. Folly, nothing short of folly, I know, most people would call my conduct. It was just this: we were talking, and I wanted him to promise that he would never care in the slightest degree for anyone else—never, if I died that week and he had to live fifty years afterwards; and he refused."

"I must say he was quite right, Miss Mary Anne. How could he tell about the future?"

"Ah! I knew you wouldn't understand, Dorothy. Of course he couldn't tell; and if I had thought that such a promise could cause him the slightest self-denial, I would not have cared for it or wished it. I never wished to make him unhappy. But the nature I myself was born with, would prevent my giving a thought, even, under any circumstances, for one instant to any other man. If he had asked for the same promise from me, it would have come of its own accord. Nothing else could have been possible to me. That is love, to my mind: the eternal union of two beings, only two —each the other's ideal; so one, by creation and by choice, that they could not—not simply would not, but could not—ever think of anybody else."

"And you expected him to be of the same mind?"

"I thought that he must be; that if not, he was not my ideal. And I felt that I could never be happy in married life with anyone short of my ideal. We had often discussed the same subject, it was the only subject where we differed. This time, this particular morning—such a lovely summer morning!—it came to a climax. He refused, as I said, to make any promise at all, except that while he was engaged to me and married to me, he would be faithful to me; nothing beyond. Though I reminded him that I should be alive just the same, even if my body were dead, thinking of him just the same beyond the grave, and loving him, he would pay no attention. He only laughed, and turned it off by saying that he hoped I should live to be a hundred. And so I broke off the engagement."

As Miss Mary Anne's speech ended thus, quite quietly and calmly, I started from my seat.

"Miss Mary Anne! You broke off the engagement! For nothing but that?"

"I could never feel happy, my dear, if I were not sure that our mutual bond was immortal. It was a terrible wrench at the time; and afterwards I was very ill. I pined and fretted for years, till the doctors said I might turn into a chronic invalid. Then I made a strong effort and roused myself, and took up my lifelong cross for dear mamma's sake. He wrote to me two or three times and tried to alter my resolution. But he was just as firm about the promise; so I begged him to write no more. And soon afterwards his father let the place and we lost sight of the family. Dear papa was dead, and I was settled here with mamma, before they went back."

"But how could you bear it all, Miss Mary Anne? I had no idea you were so brave."

"I was not brave, dear; I suffered anguish unutterable. I tried hard to stop loving him, but I could not; I never could. I've stopped trying now."

She smiled faintly, still looking into the fire.

"You see I was disappointed. It was a dreadful thought to me that he had it in his nature to care for any other woman. To me it was almost as if he cared for her already. He seemed no longer what I had thought him; my house of dreams was shattered. Well, dear, it is over now; long over. I only wish ——"

She paused; and the tears, which had ceased, gathered once again in her eyes.

"I wish I had just one thing to show you. We parted, you know, in anger; and I was going to burn it; but suddenly I repented of that, and, instead, I shut it up, away from my sight, I can't remember where. I have tried to remember, so often; oh, a hundred times; but I have never been able. I have hunted through all my papers—but, to be sure, I was standing in the hall—I have regretted, since the dear old table went, that I did not look ——"

"But what was this precious thing, Miss Mary Anne?"

"I told you, you know, that we parted on a lovely summer morning. He had brought me a yellow rose, from a favourite tree which had grown in his own childish garden. He had come early, before I was up, and had laid it on my desk in the open window of my little sitting-room, overlooking our lawn. I found it there, when I went down, I remember. Such a beautiful yellow rose!—I always had a fancy for yellow roses—and he had tied a bit of old-gold ribbon round it, in a true lover's knot, with a slip of paper inside."

"And on that slip of paper was written ——" I began, and caught myself up just in time.

"He thought a great deal of Cowper's poems, in those days, my dear; and he especially was always quoting 'My Mary'—that was his special name for me," said Miss Mary Anne, with the quick blush. "And he had written '*For my Mary*' upon the paper. Little I thought that happy moment, when I found the rose on my desk, how that summer day would end."

"Well, you must be tired, Miss Mary Anne," I said, after a long silence. "But I do wish you had the paper here to show me."

"Oh, my dear, so do I. The rose must be almost shrivelled to nothing; but the ribbon and that paper slip I would have liked to be laid with me in my coffin. And since the dear old table went, my mind has misgiven me—strange that I did not think of it before. The drawer is very deep; Jane looked in, she says—I was ill, you know, up here—but I have thought since, in that deep drawer, it might be far back and escape notice. It has only flashed upon me since I lay ill, that I stood for a long time on that dreadful evening thinking in the hall; and only a week ago, I remembered that the table was in the hall that day. Its usual place was the dining-room; for some reason it had been moved out. Could I have hidden the rose then? I hardly knew what I did—and now the table is gone! Ah, my dear! If I could only ask you to go down and search that old drawer, for me! But I wonder if we shall have some sort of glorified models of the old things we loved so much here in Heaven?"

"You know more about Heaven than I do, Miss Mary Anne. But I have a plan in my mind; keep yourself up, and perhaps I may bring you some good news when I come to-morrow. You may see your old table again yet—even here on earth," I said.

## IV.

My plan was a very simple one: to bring back the oak table, and restore it, as a Christmas present, to my old friend. I found from Jane that it had been sold to a certain broker: whose shop, in a distant quarter of the town, I hunted out by means of tram and omnibus on the morning following our talk.

As I was rattled on my way, amongst strangers, my thoughts were busy with the quaint story told by Miss Mary Anne.

"She ought to have married the Colonel," I said to myself. "At least, the Colonel is the only man who might understand her."

By "the Colonel" I meant an officer who had taken my fancy, some months before, when I met him at a country house near Girton. He was a hero who had won the Victoria Cross, besides a rich array of stripes and medals—his glories heightened by the loss of his left arm. He had only one fault, my host, a jovial country squire, had told me: his indifference to "the fair sex." Of all abhorrent terms, we Girton girls disliked this of "The Fair Sex" the most. I lost my heart to the Colonel on the spot; regarding him from afar, with interest enhanced by the consciousness that he would regard me as a bore rather than otherwise.

He had been jilted, or something, in his youth, observed our host, and seemed since to have abjured womankind. All his old brother officers said the same of him; the Squire himself had served with him for years, and had found him a staunch friend, a first-rate soldier, and in other ways a model of all the virtues; but utterly blind, as it appeared, to any charm or beauty in women.

I remembered, as I threaded my way down a by-street, long and narrow, to the broker's shop, that the Colonel, like Miss Mary Anne's lover, was tall, and must once have been fair, with a singularly pure face, a straight profile, not unlike an old carving of the Angel Gabriel which I had seen in some foreign church, and which had struck me as a remarkable combination of sternness and gentleness, with a touch of subdued fire, expressed in stone.

"If he and Miss Mary Anne could have met in their youth, what a couple they would have been!" I thought, as I entered the shop.

In my abstraction, I almost jostled an outcomer. He stood back at once, raising his hat; he did not look at me, being evidently absorbed in his own affairs. But I looked at him, and instantly recognized him. It was the Colonel! Directly I had passed, he went hurriedly forth, and away down the street with rapid strides.

I remembered then to have heard that a Colonel somebody was reported to have taken Rookwood: a beautiful country place, long vacant, some few miles from our town. Could he be this Colonel —my Colonel? Then hereafter I might be able to show him, some day, to Miss Mary Anne as her true ideal, perhaps, of whom the other was a shadow, whom she might meet some day in the Paradise upon which her fancy loved to dwell.

But to the business in hand. I looked round me with eager eyes. Here were many old oak treasures: carved chairs, cabinets, chests, but no table with its date of 1600.

"What can I show you, ma'am, this morning?" asked the broker, approaching. I questioned him concerning the table.

Yes, it was quite correct. He had purchased it a fortnight back.

A beautiful old specimen; but he regretted to say that it was gone. The day before yesterday, a gentleman's servant had thought it just the thing to please his master, who was collecting old oak, and had taken it away then and there.

"And curiously enough, ma'am, just before you came in, the gentleman himself was here, questioning me. He wished very particularly to know where I had bought the table. I hesitated; I told him that I hardly felt myself at liberty; but when I found who he was—the gentleman who had taken Rookwood, ma'am—I felt sure that he would not abuse my confidence. So I said—in strict confidence, you understand, ma'am—'Well, I bought it of Miss Mary Anne Bolton;' and he took down the address."

"Was the gentleman a Colonel somebody?"

"Colonel Armstrong, ma'am. Quite so. He passed you in the doorway, if I mistake not. A fine-looking gentleman; has lost his arm in the wars, but fine-looking as ever I saw. Very sorry, ma'am, that I cannot oblige you about the table."

I went away disappointed. Would the Colonel penetrate the depths of that old drawer? Would he toss the old yellow rose, with the love knot and the romantic little label, into the fire? I would never tell Miss Mary Anne, I thought, of the discovery I had made last summer; but if I chanced to find myself at Rookwood, I would watch for an opportunity to search that drawer once more.

The same afternoon I returned to the little house. I felt downcast: afraid to confess that I could not keep my promise of good news. How should I cheer her to-day, I wondered. But I walked bravely in and was going at once to her room, when her thin voice called from the parlour.

"Why, Miss Mary Anne, downstairs?"

"Oh, Dorothy! Dorothy, my dear! Come!"

She held out her arms, her eyes were shining, the girlish bloom was bright on her cheeks. She looked like someone who had died an old maid and awakened a young girl in the heavenly Eden. In her hand was an open letter.

"Take it, dear; read it. You will believe now. You will see that there is such a thing as romance in our every-day life, even now."

I read, in a man's strong writing:

"MARY, do you remember me? I have never forgotten you. I was very angry when you cast me off, and I tried hard to forget you, but I could not. I might have given you that promise, after all; I did not know my own nature. I have never been able, though at first I wished it, to love anyone, to care for anyone—even with the slightest shade of caring—except you. I ceased long ago to wish it. I have never in all my life had one thought for any other woman.

"I have just discovered your address by means of your father's

old table, which my servant bought for me by chance two days ago. Far back in the drawer, last night, I found that yellow rose, with the written slip. Mary, do you remember? Why did you leave the rose there? You were angry, no doubt, like me. But now may I bring it back to you, with the same words again?

"JOHN ARMSTRONG."

"Oh, Miss Mary Anne!" I cried, looking up from the letter; "what have you answered him?"

"It was only a short answer," she said, between laughing and crying; "I wrote only, 'Yes, bring it back.'"

I went again the same evening at her request to hear the end. I was a little too soon. I opened the sitting-room door, as was my habit, softly yet suddenly, and there was my tall Colonel with his back to me, his right arm round that fragile little form, his high head bowed above another head, which he had drawn to its fitting refuge on his breast.

"I think there has been time enough to prove me, Mary," I heard him say, as with noiseless speed I retreated. "Can you trust me now at last, my Mary? Shall I give you that promise now?"

And in his hand was the yellow rose.

E. CHILTON.

## A VISION.

FROM VICTOR HUGO.

CREATOR! Lord! in watches of the night
I have sat pensive by the silent sea;
In desert places where, from vale to height,
No foot of man has trod—alone with Thee.

Have heard the bird of darkness hooting there—
Have seen the pale flower trembling in the grass,
The weeping trees rise through the murky air,
The livid dawn o'er the horizon pass.

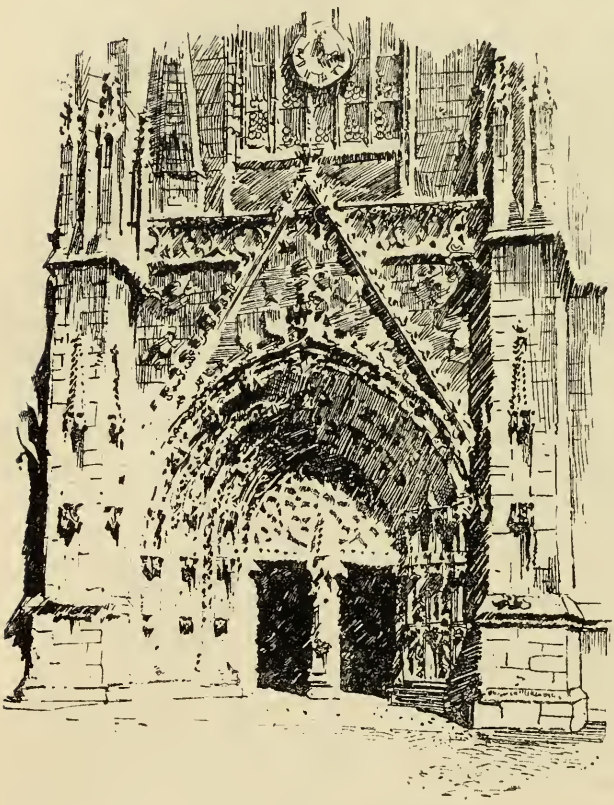
Have seen at eve black floating phantoms sweep
With noiseless wing across the distant plain—
Have heard, from overhanging rocks, the deep
Mysterious moaning of the midnight main.

Have watched—appalled—the horrible moon draw near
And through the darkness of the pines pass by.
It seemed I had surprised the look of fear
Creation wears before Eternity.

C. E. MEETKERKE.

# THE BRETONS AT HOME.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "Letters from Majorca," etc. etc.



South Porch.

OUR host—we will call him the Canon, for the sake of convenience—was standing beyond the porter's lodge just within the courtyard, and welcomed us with a charming mixture of dignity and cordiality. He seemed to have inherited much of the courtly spirit of his ancestors, tones and manners that are so fast dying out amongst us.

His present surroundings suited him well. The Palace buildings adjoined the Cathedral, and the whole block might almost be said to form three sides of an irregular quadrangle. There was a great beauty and charm about the Gothic tower or turret, which formed the angle of the palace. Beyond the building ran the high dead wall that shut out the precincts from the road. The garden was full of old-fashioned, sweet-smelling flowers. The Cathedral rose in all its beauty—all the charm of seclusion. From the end of the garden one gazed upon a wonderful vision of apse and flying buttress and delicate pinnacle, all crowned by those lovely spires that looked almost like lacework against the clear background of sky, which was beginning to pale before the first approach of twilight.

"Here," said the Canon, "I spend much of my time, a great part of the week, which for me flies all too quickly. I walk up and down these quiet, solitary paths, with no other companion than the flowers and this beautiful and sacred building. Everything about me conduces to thought and contemplation. I muse upon the history I am writing; upon the stern warfare the Church has ever fought; the strange scenes and vicissitudes she has gone through: the Church of

Christ, of whatever form or denomination; whether Protestant, Romish, or Greek; the Church that recognises the same Fountain Head, whatever the ritual or ceremonial; which began eighteen centuries ago, when a few poor fishermen were bidden to go forth and preach the Gospel to all the world, and will go on till time shall be no more. Insensibly I often drift away into my own life and lose myself in the past. I think of my early days; the world of fashion in which I then lived; and wonder how it would have been had destiny made me a soldier and not a priest. No doubt every life has its charm, and to every one of us his occupation seems the best if he throws into it his whole heart and soul. So in the afternoon of life it comes to pass that, instead of tramping the battle field amidst scenes of carnage, I am treading the quiet paths of an ecclesiastical garden, writing a History of the Church, and in all earnestness and humility endeavouring to save souls from death and convert sinners from the error of their ways. And I am content—that is the great secret of life."

At this moment a tall, pale, thin personage, dressed in a monk's cloak with a cowl falling behind, approached, and with a profound reverence announced that dinner was ready. He was strange and singular-looking. In his walk there was a peculiar ease and grace that belong only to those born in a better station of life. His face was remarkably refined, strangely sweet in expression, whilst large, wonderful brown eyes, now soft and subdued, looked capable of flashing with the fire of genius or the impulse of fanaticism. With all its sweetness, at this moment the prevailing characteristics of the face were sadness and determination, as if some sorrow had passed over the life and some fixed purpose was dominating the soul within. He was still in the very flower of manhood, having apparently scarcely passed his thirtieth year.

His mission accomplished, he walked down the long pathway with the same graceful movement and disappeared within the house. His garments were spotless and seemed of the finest material.

"A remarkable man," we ventured to observe. "Can he be a monk, or a novitiate, or has he set himself some penance in life, like the mystics of old?"

"I was quite sure you would notice him," replied the Canon, smiling; "nor are you far from the truth. Adrien, as he is called here, is indeed a singular being. He belongs, as you perceive, to a refined station of life. Had he lived in the middle ages he would have been a profound mystic. The days of religious intolerance would have found him a conscientious persecutor or the most sublime of martyrs. He has intellect of the highest order, amounting to genius. I have held religious discussions with him in which it has been difficult to hold my own. On the impulse of the moment he has given expression to flights of extraordinary eloquence, and I have listened, wondering and enraptured."

"But why is he here in so strange a garb, so humble a capacity?" we asked.

"That is part of his singular character and disposition. I have told you that he is something of a fanatic. He has an idea that the sin which is inherent in every human heart, and is its unhappy birthright, requires an occasional and distinct penance and withdrawal from one's ordinary life and surroundings. If everyone held the same belief, I need not say that the world would soon be out of joint, and we might at once all turn monks or mystics. Fortunately, it is only the few who cannot conform to the present state of society and the world: though very often these few are distinguished by strong and original minds. You cannot force these people. It is best to let them go their own way, work out their own destiny. Time will often bring them right in the end. It will do so in the case of Adrien. He is now thirty-two years of age, and at forty, his peculiarities will have settled down into an earnest purpose, full of the calmness and common sense of a great intellect."

"But how does all this explain his presence here, his peculiar dress, his apparently humble office?" we asked.

"I will tell you," replied the Canon. "There is something about me," he added with a peculiar smile, "I know not what—whether it be mesmerism, or merely the virtue of sympathy, which so many may own, so few really exercise—this something which I possess and use unconsciously, has the power of attracting people towards me in a strange and sometimes a troublesome degree. Probably it partly accounts for the influence I have over men, persuading and convincing and changing the lives of many, where others before me have failed. One of those thus devoted to me is Adrien; but in his case, I confess the tie is a delight and a refreshing of the spirit. His beautiful disposition and his vigorous mind charm me more and more every day. He has an idea that we must all of us, at certain times, withdraw from the daily round of life, the pleasures and frivolities of the world, and do penance for our original sin. He really belongs to the great world; but for three months every year, he leaves it, changes his dress, puts on the monk's cowl and capuchin, and becomes a member of my house. During that time he makes himself my groom of the chambers, attaches himself to my person, waits upon me at table—what little attention I need—and becomes my shadow. He has his own room, and is waited on in his turn by my two old domestics, who are almost as devoted to him as they are to me. He will accept no privileges beyond the one of occasionally holding converse with me. He travelled with me when we came to Quimper, but you did not remark him. He would not even allow himself the luxury of the same compartment; and when the train stopped, he quietly slipped away and made his way to the palace before me. His time is nearly up. In a fortnight he goes back to the world."

"And how long has he persevered in this strange intention?" we asked

"It is seven years since he first came to me, and each year has seen him at his post. He tells me they are the happiest days of his life, and when I suggest a conformity with the more ordinary state of existence, he shakes his head, but will not even argue the point. ——And now to satisfy the needs of our mortal condition; the soup grows chill."

We had stood at the very end of the garden, the flowers around us scenting the air. To our right was the lovely apse of the cathedral, beautiful in its rich details, its gothic windows, its flying buttresses and graceful pinnacles. The declining rays of the sun still gilded the wonderful spires that stretched heavenwards, almost like twin visions of a celestial architecture. At the other end of the garden uprose the charming buildings of the palace, and on our left was the high dead wall separating us from the world; from the river that ran its course within a few feet of us, spanned by its numerous small bridges that gave access to lovely gardens, where green lawns refreshed the eye and gorgeous flowers dazzled by their rich profusion. But all this was hidden from the palace garden. Here, everything was the beauty of repose; we were steeped in a sacred atmosphere; we were surrounded by traces of antiquity, the highest and most beautiful form of architecture. Above all reposed the calm, pure evening sky, that spoke of heaven, and rest, and immortality: all that is to be.

As we moved downward, Adrien's figure appeared in the doorway, and seemed all that was needed to complete the charm of the picture. His questioning gaze rested upon us for a moment, as if asking why we lingered; and something told us that our host was in the habit of losing himself in thought, and, but for gentle reminders, would often forget the duties he owed to digestion.

The Canon was a charming and dignified host, in the midst of great simplicity. Adrien pleased himself by waiting upon us, and although our host frequently endeavoured to draw him out—for our edification we were assured—he succeeded only in obtaining monosyllables from him in response. This, no doubt, he made part of his so-called "penance," though, judging from his expression, his life must have been singularly pure and guileless. He moved noiselessly as a shadow. We felt the strange fascination of those wonderful eyes, large, dreamy and subdued, but capable of so much. His head rested upon his shoulders with the bearing of a monarch, and the capuchin he wore, tied round the waist by a silken girdle, could not conceal the perfection of his form.

The shades of night were gathering when we passed out of the dining room, once more into the palace garden. The evening star trembled in the sky.

"Night grows apace," said the Canon; "the shadows are gathering. It is the most beautiful hour of the day; let us enjoy it. We will take our coffee later; Adrien shall minister to us, and then, perhaps, I shall persuade those beautiful hands of his to give us such

a rare treat as you have seldom experienced. Then you will see what soul there is in this singular man. Come! I promised you that we would awaken the echoes of this grand cathedral and give chase to the ghostly shadows that old André the Suisse declares to be supernatural. The doors are not yet closed, but at this hour we shall no doubt have the vast building to ourselves. We shall find old André awaiting us. He even seems to have displayed some light for our benefit—for see the windows. Has not this *Lux in tenebris* a singular charm for you? Does it not excite thought and arouse the imagination to flights of fancy that would be impossible in the garish hours of the day?"

The windows to which he pointed reflected some faint artificial light within, just as we had seen them the evening that we had first entered and had found the little group of Sisters at Confession, and ourselves barely escaped imprisonment amid those vast and silent aisles and arches.

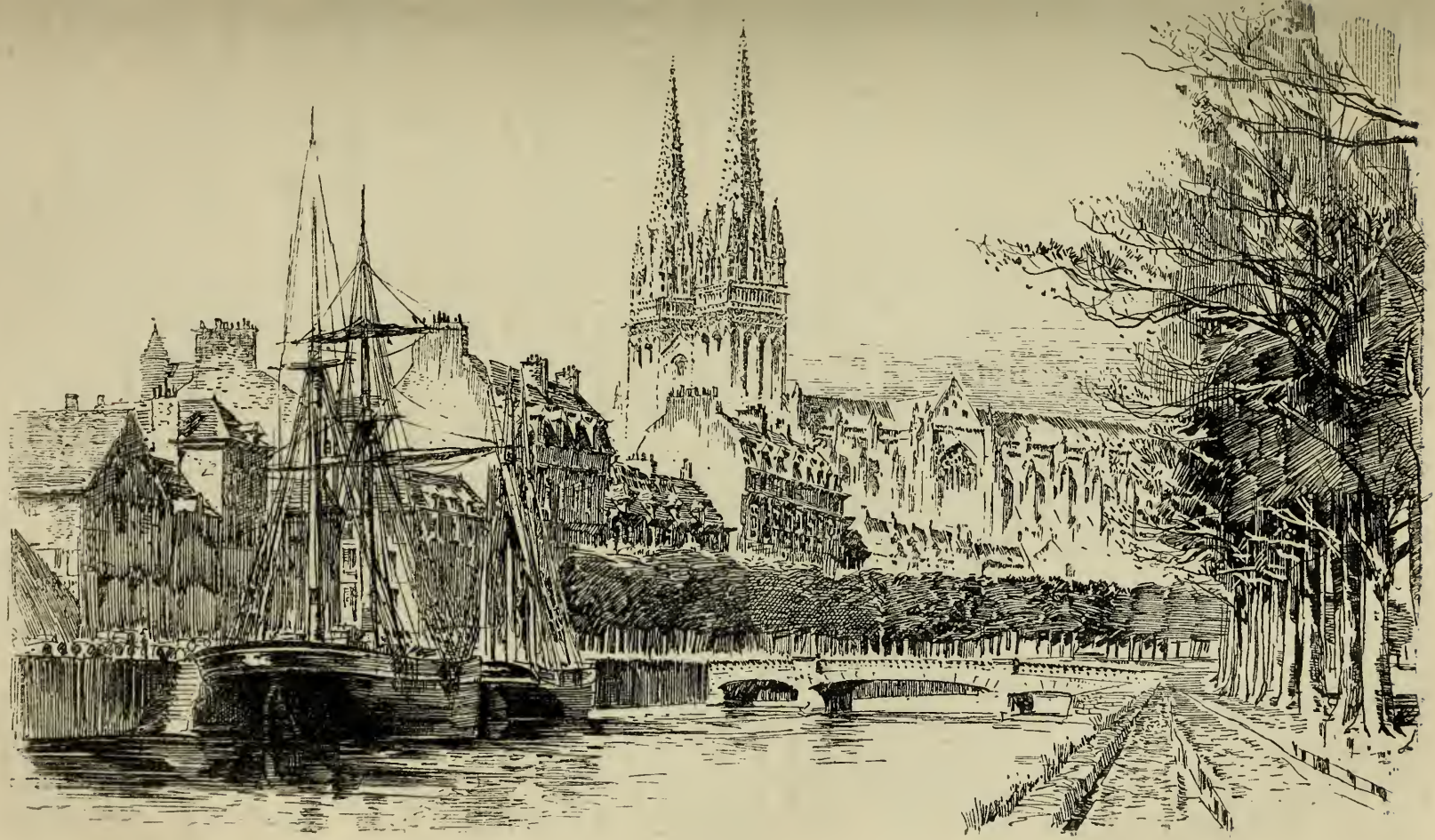
We passed through the garden and entered by a small private doorway, of which the Canon carried the key. Immediately we found ourselves in the great space of this sacred building. To-night, perhaps because we were specially in tune with the scene, perhaps because we were becoming more familiar with it, the interior seemed to us more effective, more impressive than ever. We dimly traced the wonderful outlines of aisle and nave and vaulted roof; the pillars looked like a forest of huge petrified trees which might have existed before the Flood, so solemn did they appear, so silent and still, so immovable, as we caught long vistas of them faintly outlined by the windows beyond. Old André, anticipating our visit, had lighted up a few jets here and there, sufficient to guide our steps and bring out the wonderful lights and shadows that he declared belonged to ghostland. He had heard us enter, though we had passed in so noiselessly; but the slightest sound was magnified in this vast and echoing building. He advanced towards us, a lighted torch in his hand, and, with a reverence as profound as Adrien's but not quite so graceful, asked the Canon his pleasure.

"Still faithful to your post, my good André," said the Canon, in those rich and winning tones which no doubt formed part of his power over his fellow-men. They were irresistible. A winning voice will convince you almost against your reason.

"No merit to myself that I do my duty, monseigneur," returned André, in more humble tones than we had yet heard from him. "I have had fifty years of apprenticeship. First it grew into a habit, then became a necessity. I could not sleep now, if I patrolled this pavement for five minutes less than the usual time."

"André," rebuked the Canon, "how often am I to tell you that I am not monseigneur, have no right to the title, and that you must not call me by it?"

"The bishop is monseigneur, and I will not call you, whom I



QUIMPER.

respect above every other man in the world, by any less title," returned André, obstinately. "Du reste, if you are not monseigneur now, you will be some day."

The Canon laughed. "You see that I cannot always have my own way," he said, turning to us. "André persists in according me rank to which I am not entitled, do not even aspire. I do not mind telling you that it has been offered me, but I could not persuade myself to change my calm and tranquil life, so full of a quiet activity, and I would fain hope, so full of usefulness, for the anxieties and uneasiness of a mitred head. In the one case I might have been useful to the Church, but her high places are full of useful men; she can do without me; whilst personal influence amongst the people is far more rare and much more needed. Some day, if I live, it will be offered me again, and then, when I have grown too old for an active life, I shall accept it. I may indeed be offered a cardinal's hat, simply because I value it not. Would you come and see me in Rome, where I should take up my residence?"

"If you would not try to convert me," we laughed.

"Nay," returned the Canon, "I love not labour lost, and I see that his Holiness himself and all the Cardinals assembled in solemn conclave would prevail nothing against you. Not all the fervour of Ignatius Loyola, nor all the eloquent fanaticism of Savonarola would turn you from your purpose. So should it ever be. Let us have our convictions and let us die for them, if need be. André," turning to the old Suisse, "have you closed the doors? Is it not time?"

"More than time, monseigneur, and all are locked and closed but the small south door looking towards the palace. The truth is that Mademoiselle Ponpon is at her devotions; she seems to have fallen into one of her dreams, and I thought I would not disturb her until the last moment. I lighted a gas jet near her on purpose to arouse her. It had not the slightest effect. See, she is there."

We looked, and in the bend of the aisle surrounding the choir, near which came the Lady Chapel and the beautiful apse of the Cathedral, brought out into faint relief by a solitary jet, we beheld a kneeling figure and thought that we recognised the small and graceful outlines of H. C.'s devoted admirer. He had started when the name was mentioned, and, though we could not see, no doubt the flush of emotion rose to his brow.

"Mademoiselle Ponpon!" we exclaimed; "we are acquainted with her. She even went so far as to make an offer of marriage——"

"Oh, pray spare my feelings," interrupted H. C., and this time the blush, with the aid of old André's torch, was quite visible.

"An offer of marriage to our friend here," smiled the Canon, passing over H. C.'s exclamation. "Poor Mademoiselle Ponpon! I know her weak point. On all other points she is perfectly sane and trusty. I have always known her and always respected her. I knew her in the days of their grandeur, and, on her mother's side, I

am intimate with all her relatives. They really would have assisted her, but she was too proud to serve, as it were, where once she had reigned. As it is they assist her, though she does not know it. Every now and then I forward her a substantial sum of money, which keeps her in great comfort, and she persuades herself that it is a gift from the Church. It really comes from the de Bellevilles. Her Magasin de Chaussures is merely a small matter which gives her something to think about, and perhaps keeps her mind from further delusions. Here she comes."

"It is time," said old André, to whom everything but the last exclamation had been inaudible. "It is time. For at least an hour and a half she might have been a graven image. I do not think she has moved hand or foot."

The small figure, robed in mourning, rose from the chair, and quietly flitted down the encircling aisle towards us. Her tiny footfalls produced no echo; she moved as silently as one of André's shadows. Evidently lost in contemplation, she did not observe us until she had nearly reached us. Then she started and paused. André's torch lighted up her face; a sad face, full of refinement and a pathetic expression that went straight to one's heart. Her eyes were red, as if with much weeping. Then she recognised the Canon.

"Ah! my dear Canon! my dear friend and benefactor!" she murmured, holding out both her hands to him, and making a courtly reverence as he bent over them. "Are you surprised to see me here at this hour, and in these sable garments? Have you forgotten that this is the anniversary of my mother's death? My dear mother!" the tears flowing afresh; "who never gave me an angry word in her life, and whose loss has been my desolation. I always come here on the evening of this day, and pray that we may be re-united in eternal happiness."

"I had indeed forgotten it, my child," said the Canon, "or I should have come to you this morning. She was indeed the best of mothers, the most noble of women. Your emotion does honour to your good heart. You have the consolation of knowing that you were ever worthy of her love."

"Ah, no! no one could be worthy of that," cried the little gentlewoman. "It would be impossible." Then looking up, she recognised H. C., and again slightly started.

"You here also!" she cried. "At this hour, and in the company of my dear Canon! Do you know," turning to the latter, half smiling through her tears, "this young man had the temerity to make me an offer of marriage. I had to be very firm with him. Can you imagine it—on so short an acquaintance—and at my time of life, when I have quite done with the frivolities of the world, and am thinking of taking the veil. Would you advise me to take the veil, my dear Canon?"

"I think I should wait a little," replied the Canon, to whom the

question was evidently not new. "Wait a few years, and then see what your feelings may be upon the subject. The veil, you know, is not everyone's vocation."

"But the rest and repose, the retirement, the freedom from these offers of marriage," objected Mademoiselle Ponpon. "It is so hard to give pain by refusing."

"Your life is very calm and tranquil," said the Canon. "It could not be much more so in the cloister. And you are doing some good. I know that you visit the poor and often give consolation. That is a privilege not to be lightly esteemed. You are doing your duty."

Mademoiselle Ponpon sighed. "I try in my humble way to do what I can. My father was a true Breton, though he was not of the great world, and I do not forget the motto of his family: 'Toujours loyale, advienne la mort.' I try to act up to it. He was a good man, and he had his ancestors, too, though they were not exactly marquises and archbishops."

"We cannot all have illustrious ancestors," smiled the Canon.

"Oh no. It is the privilege of the few. Do you know, my dear Canon," added Mademoiselle Ponpon, "I think I shall leave you my great-grandfather the archbishop's throne; then when you become bishop—or even archbishop, who knows—you might use it at your great ecclesiastical or œcumenical councils. If the poor thing had feeling it would be so glad to be reinstated in its ancient dignity."

"When you die, ma chère enfant!" laughed the Canon. "I shall die long before you, if the ordinary course of nature be not interrupted. I am turned sixty, whilst you are only——"

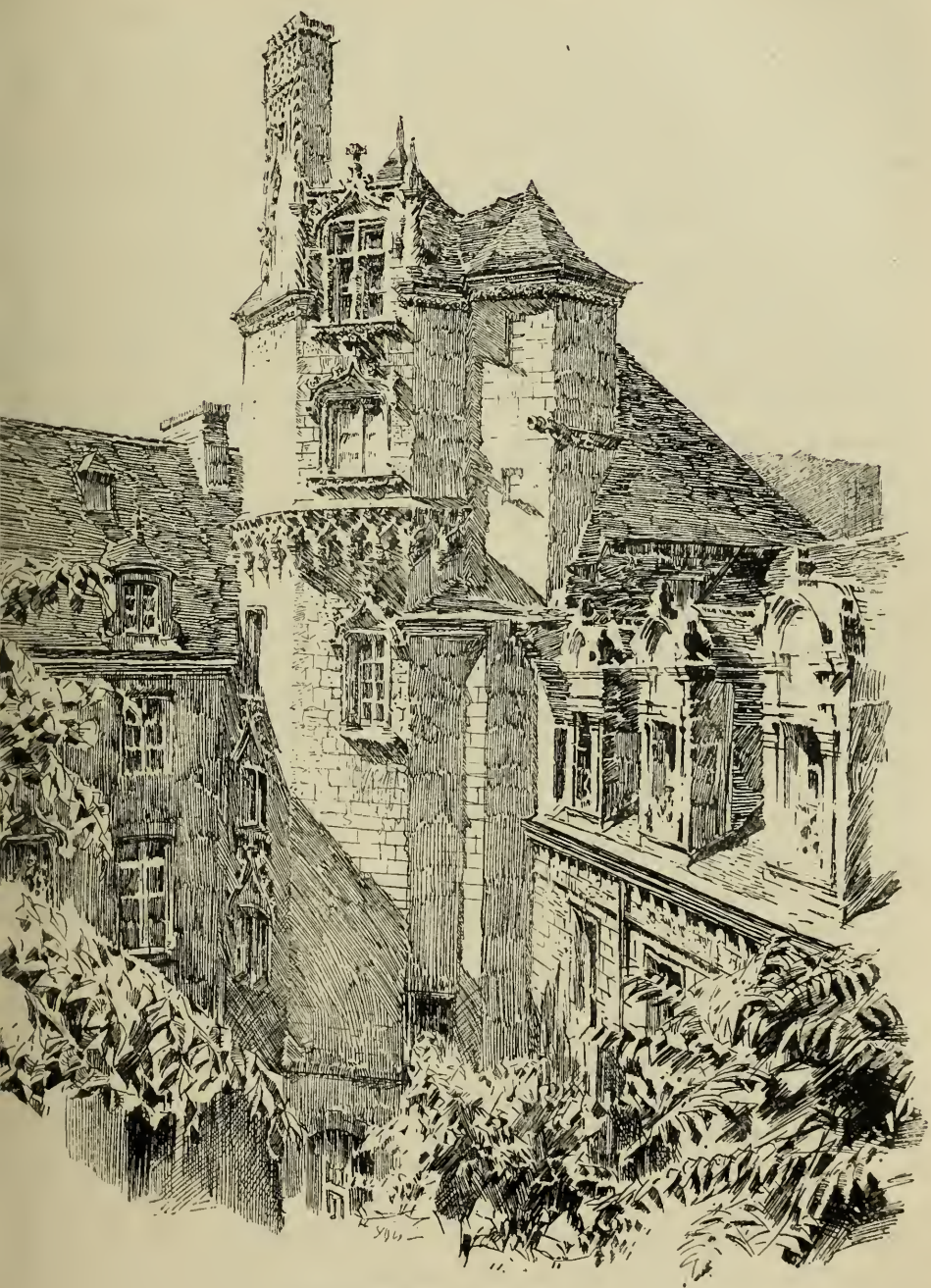
"Oh, fie!" cried Mademoiselle Ponpon, her human nature creeping out even here. "A woman's age! My dear Canon, a woman has no age. She is always young. I once knew an old lady of ninety-two who was so sensitive on the point that she actually had her daughter's age taken off her tombstone because it revealed her own. Even at ninety-two she could not bear to be thought old. But the shadows have gathered, and night has fallen. It is later than I thought for, and I must go. I am glad we met; you have taken me a little out of my sorrow. To you, my dear Canon, I say au revoir; but I think for our friend's peace of mind, here, to him I should say *adieu*. André, escort me to a doorway and let me out."

Again giving both her hands to the Canon and making her courtly reverence, and with a parting glance at H. C., in which we thought we detected both tenderness and reproach—it may have been only fancy—she passed away down the long dark aisle, whilst André, with his torch, accompanied her with every token of respectful homage.

"Poor Mademoiselle Ponpon!" murmured the Canon. "She is really an excellent creature; one of the salt of the earth, with her little tender heart, her sympathy with the woes of others, and her patient endurance of her own. There are few like her."

"How is it that she has taken this strange delusion with regard to marriage?" we asked.

"It is a sad story," returned the Canon. "When she was only



THE BISHOP'S PALACE.

ghteen she was sought in marriage by a young Frenchman, to whom e was deeply attached. His father's property adjoined her father's, d they saw much of each other from childhood and youth, con- ary to the ordinary French custom. At that time she was supposed

to be a great heiress. Monsieur Ponpon never approved of the young man, and it is certain that his life in Paris, where he spent six months of the year, was not to his credit. The betrothal, however, took place, but at the last moment Monsieur Ponpon, who was already beginning to be secretly embarrassed, was not ready with the marriage settlements, and the whole thing was broken off. The young fellow cared more for his bride's dowry than for his bride. Poor Mademoiselle Ponpon fell into a melancholy state. She became possessed of the illusion that everyone wanted to marry her. It was feared that her whole reason would go. Then came the crash, followed by her father's death. It roused her, and so far was a blessing. She gave herself up to her mother, to whom she had ever been devoted. Her reason was saved, but the delusion remained. It does no harm. We have no 'breach of promises' in our country," smiled the Canon, "as you have in yours. And until lately we were spared all the scandal of divorce cases: the least objectionable of which, for the sake of society, should be carried on *in camera*. The publicity that is given to these matters is terrible. The moral foundations of your country will inevitably be undermined and will crumble away."

We had gradually made our way down to the west doorway. André, after letting out Madamoiselle Ponpon and doubly locking the door, had gone up to the choir gates and taken his seat under the shadow of the pulpit, his little torch diffusing a sort of halo of light about him, intensifying the surrounding gloom. He, too, looked a pathetic object, with his long white hair, his attitude full of resignation, as if he were already listening for the first notes of a summons that should call him to the land of shadows, amongst which he already seemed to dwell.

We now had the vast, gloomy building to ourselves. There was no possibility of intrusion; the portals were closed against the outside world.

"I love to come here at this hour," said the Canon. "I never fail to do so every night when I am here. I quietly let myself in with my key, and if I do not wish to be in absolute darkness, I light one or two gas jets. But there are nights when the moon shines in gloriously at that East window and gives me a light that is soft and celestial. Then, indeed, there seem to be strange forms and shadows flitting about, and one could almost forgive André for endowing them with spiritual life. An unspeakable repose falls upon the mind; all earthly cares and concerns disappear. We seem in touch with the divine; and often I appear to have seen that text stretched across the wide nave in luminous letters, 'A building not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.' Many a hard point, many a difficult problem has solved itself to me at these moments, and have gone back to the world refreshed and ready for battle. Some of my best sermons have been composed whilst pacing these dark

nd solemn aisles and arches in the silent hours of the night—for once spent many months in Quimper. And yet again, I sometimes seem to have been most happy when I have chosen my text s I went up the pulpit stairs, for I believe in a wide application of the romise, 'Whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye.'"

We were passing the Lady Chapel at the moment. Its somewhat rude and garish decoration was lost in the darkness; its beautiful urves and outlines could be only faintly discerned. It looked the nore beautiful and impressive. The chair that poor Mademoiselle Ponpon had lately used stood out solitary and alone in the centre of he aisle. Her spirit still seemed to hover about it, and in the bscurity the dark eyes, red with weeping, and pale, pathetic face eemed to stand out as a visible testimony to the power of influence; he abiding influence of a soul that had passed into the unseen: a nother whose pure life and intense love remained as a tangible resence to her daughter, and undoubtedly brought her into very lose relationship with heaven itself.

The gloom of the interior, its almost total obscurity, made it weird nd mysterious in the extreme. Its outlines seemed gigantic, its pace unlimited, for much was lost in the darkness. André, as if ntent upon impressing us with the supernatural, was moving his orch to and fro. He was only lost in thought, or perhaps holding ommune with his shadows, but the effect was almost such as to xcuse his strange mania. Lights and shadows flitted about arches nd pillars, and here and there a gleam flashed out for a moment rom the tinsel of some bright ornament. The organ pipes at the ar west end were faintly outlined. One could almost have fancied hat a spirit hand touched the keys, and a flood of spirit melody was olling through the aisles. But all was silence, the silence of night nd death; the utter silence of the shadows as they flitted to and ro was almost a plea for the supernatural.

But the extreme darkness of the windows warned us that night had allen, and that we had lingered long in these sacred precincts. André as still sitting under the shadow of the pulpit, the image of patient esignation. Beyond him, the gates of the choir, closed and fastened, ere lighted up by his torch; the beautiful stalls within seemed eopled with a ghostly army of monks; and far down, behind the high ltar, we faintly traced the double-pointed arch that separated it from he Lady Chapel.

"A temple not made with hands," murmured the Canon, as we gain stood far down looking eastward. "How often the words haunt ie. Look at this immense space, unlimited as it seems in the darkess; these wonderful aisles and arches, this forest of pillars; we can carcely imagine that the brain of man designed these beautiful outnes, and the hand of man raised them stone by stone. What a ower there is in religion. What fervour and devotion there was in he middle ages, and in the ages that went before them. How

much was done in those days, how little spoken: an age of deeds rather than words. How little man thought of himself, his little brief authority, his own vain glory! All was done from the one impelling motive—the glory of God—therefore all was done well. Throughout creation the one universal law was recognised: 'The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof.' And now, how have we fallen from our high estate! We are like the Israelites of old. Before we take our citadel, we must march seven times round and blow our trumpets. We do more, in one sense, because greater facilities are given to us: but our religious fervour evaporates in councils and debates, each one striving for the mastery; and I fear that the singleness of heart, which can alone make the deed blessed, is lost sight of in the individual wish for fame, the applause of the world. We love the praise of men more than the praise of God, forgetting that if we secure the one we may safely leave the other to take care of itself. 'He that honoureth ME I will honour.' What more do we need, what greater promise can we have?"

We had gradually moved up the aisle and were now standing in front of the pulpit. André rose at our approach, and stood meekly gazing. He would willingly have remained there the whole night at the Canon's pleasure.

The outlines of the pulpit seemed to arouse some latent thought in the latter. He looked at us in comic despair.

"Wretched man that I am!" he cried. "I have been preaching instead of practising. You were to have mounted the pulpit and given the sermon, and I was to sit humbly at the feet of Gamaliel. Who knows? It might have been a turning point in your life. You may possess, hidden away in those deep recesses which lie in every heart, and which sometimes chance unlocks, the religious fervour and eloquence of a Savonarola, without his intolerance and want of judgment. At your bidding the market-place might also have blazed with the offerings of the repentant and the devoted."

"And the opportunity is lost, the moment has passed for ever," we laughed. "Do not fear. The tongues of men and of angels have not been given to us. When we would most persuade, a demon of silence falls upon us, and the words fly away from the thought. We can only comfort ourselves with the recollection that if speech is silvern, silence is golden. And if we were ambitious we might think of St. Paul also, of whom it was said, 'He is mean of speech.' But, my dear Canon, you would beguile us into remaining here until the night shadows flee away. André looks grey and weary."

"My poor André!" cried the Canon. "You do look more than usually tired to-night. And there is a grey look upon your face that is not usual to it. Were you keeping vigil here last night? communing with your shadows, imagining that Spirit land had come to you?—whereas, my poor fellow, it is only we who go to it. The boundary line once passed, none return."

"Say not so, monseigneur," replied André. "It is the only subject on which I dare disagree with you; but I must believe the evidence of my senses, the experience of fifty years. Last night I was indeed holding vigil within these walls. After I had locked up, I sat down a moment as I often do, fell into a train of thought, and lost count of time. But there came to me a vision. Suddenly the shadows took celestial forms; I seemed surrounded by a divine light, and the air appeared full of whispering voices. Gradually the forms receded to make way for one form, which was that of one long since departed and much beloved. I felt no surprise, no fear; rather I seemed filled with ecstasy. She beckoned to me; and she made me understand that my mortal career was almost ended; I too should soon pass into the Spirit world."

"My poor André, you simply went to sleep and dreamed all this," said the Canon. "You admit that you lost count of time. That means that sleep overtook you, and the vision is accounted for."

"As monseigneur pleases," returned André. "Dream or vision, it is all one; it came from the same source, and with the same object—to warn me that my time grows short. That troubles me not. If I could only die whilst monseigneur is here, in his service, I should say that Heaven had been merciful to me."

"Singular being!" murmured the Canon, as we moved towards the small private doorway. "I do not believe in his vision, but I do not like that greyness on his face. I have noticed, at times, on certain faces a look that I can only describe as the shadow of death. It would take little to make me believe that I see it to-night."

We waited at the doorway whilst André extinguished the last light. The last outlines faded away as he put out his torch, leaving us for a moment in the midst of the silence of centuries, a darkness that might be felt. Then we passed out into the night, and into far less obscurity. The stars were shining in the heavens, and the deep blue vault seemed larger only by comparison than the one we had just left. The finite mind cannot grasp the infinite in nature, or the eternal in time. The windows of the palace were lighted up, and threw rays of light across the garden, showing up the sleeping flowers, illuminating windows and pinnacles where they touched the Cathedral. The deep bell struck out the hour of ten, startling the air with its vibrations.

"The moments have flown," cried the Canon. "Surely it is nine and not ten that we hear? Go, my good André, into the servants' refectory, and ask them to give you a draught of hot Bordeaux, or something yet stronger. You need it to-night. Come what may, my old friend, remember that your devotion to me has been well appreciated, and that as long as life is granted me, you will keep your place in my heart. And now," turning to us, "let us to our books and our coffee; and let us see how far our powers of persuasion will prevail with Adrien. Another singular being, but how different!

Well may it have been said of human nature, 'There are vessels of gold and silver, and there is the potter's clay!' And all are useful in time and place."

We passed through the dining-room, and it seemed ages since we had sat there, with Adrien waiting upon us, almost as silent as a shadow himself and as unresponsive. The tall graceful figure in the monk's cloak, the large soft brown eyes that looked into your own with a dreamy far-off gaze that almost seemed to mesmerize you, still haunted the apartment. Almost we expected to see him leaning over the Canon's chair: an antiquated, high-backed construction that looked almost like a chair of state; but the room was quite empty of everything excepting its strange charm and influence: the influence that always follows those whom we love much, and for whom we have the deepest veneration. Have you, reader, never had the good fortune to possess one so near and dear to you, friend or relative? and on entering a room sacred to them, have you not felt almost that you were treading upon holy ground, where, day after day and year after year, prayers have arisen like incense; it may be for yourself; and you have felt surrounded by a holy atmosphere, a spiritual influence, which has caused you to hush your breath and tread softly. Thrice happy they, and thrice blessed, whose characters possess this divine beauty of Holiness.

We passed on into the library, the room in which we had seen the Canon after our visit to the wonderful old house in the morning. It was now brilliantly lighted up by lamps which threw their full rays upon a large oaken table. Upon the table were many books and manuscripts, most of them evidently of great rarity and antiquity.

"Some of these I have had brought here from the town library on purpose to show you; for the town, you doubtless have discovered, possesses an immense and very valuable collection, as well as many rare manuscripts. I must frankly confess that I am not myself a great bibliomaniac; the contents of a volume have far more attraction for me than its antiquity or its particular printer; but some of these Elzivir editions, and some of these wonderfully illuminated manuscripts that take us back to the early ages when a monk devoted his life perhaps to the production of a single copy—such must possess a charm for even the most unenthusiastic and unlearned."

He touched a silver bell, and in a few moments Adrien glided into the room, still clad in his monk's dress, carrying a small waiter holding coffee and cups: cups of rare and delicate china, and a small silver coffee-pot beautifully chased with the work of the first empire. These he placed upon the table, and was gliding away again when the Canon arrested his steps.

"Adrien," he said, placing his hand upon his shoulders, "why not remain, and take your coffee, and examine these precious volumes with us—you who understand them so well and delight in them even more than I?"

"My penance," murmured Adrien, throwing his wonderful gaze over the treasures upon the table. "This would be no penance, but self-indulgence, the height of pleasure."

"My son, your penance, as you term it, is virtually over," returned the Canon. "And how often have I told you that you carry your idea too far, and are in danger of mysticism? Beware of too much introspection; in the end it paralyses one's power of action, destroys the just balance of the finest mind."

"You know that in this I cannot help myself," murmured Adrien, in a voice that was soft and low, and fell like music upon the ear. "It is not I, myself, who exact this penance. It is something within me that is stronger than I. And why call it a penance, after all? It is simply withdrawing for a time from the world and all its hollowness, all its so-called pleasures, which are phantom delusions. It is coming into contact with reality, with holiness; spending three short months of one's year with yourself, and returning into the world strengthened with your earnestness, pursued by your influence. Can this be penance?" he asked, opening his eyes wide the better to gaze upon the Canon's noble features, while a smile of infinite sweetness parted his lips.

The Canon shook his head, and he, too, smiled.

"If ever anyone tried to awaken in me the spirit of vanity," he reproved, "it is you, my son. This needs punishment, and I punish you, accordingly, by laying a command upon you. We will pass over the coffee and the books; the one is a bagatelle, the other you can examine at your leisure: in the smaller hours of the night or the healthier moments of the day. But I command that in half-an-hour, when we have examined these treasures, you come in with your violin, charm us all, and waft us to Paradise with your wonderful strains."

"For you to command is to be obeyed," said Adrien, after the faintest possible hesitation. "I will come. Music, after all, brings us nearer to heaven. It is the one recreation I take with me into my retreat. If I became a monk it should be the one companion of my cell—or I would never be monk at all."

He quietly left the room. The Canon poured out the coffee, which stimulated our nerves for the work in hand. For half-an-hour we were lost in a close examination of ancient volumes and wonderfully illuminated MSS.; gems of skill, marvels of colouring and design, such as could never now be reproduced; an art that was lost when the patience, the religious devotion, the leisure years of the monks gave place to a new order of things, under which the sands of time were no longer measured by the slow-falling hour-glass, but by a figure gifted with outspread wings and a reaper's scythe.

At the end of the half-hour the door slowly opened and Adrien once more entered, violin in hand. He had put aside the monk's cloak and cowl, and was dressed in a small, loose morning jacket, for greater freedom in playing. The transformation was singular.

He looked as if he had returned to the world and belonged to it, but an example of humanity singularly pure, refined and elevated. The charm about him was more real and distinct, for the monk's capuchin had seemed to separate him from his fellows and to place him beyond the pale of ordinary sympathy. Now he was one of ourselves, and our hearts went out to this perfect image of the human face divine.

He took up his standing in the farthest corner of the room, and the Canon turned down the lamps and steeped us in a sort of *chiaro oscuro*, well suited to the hour and the scene. "Now for Paradise," he murmured, and throwing himself back in his chair, closing his eyes and folding his arms, he gave himself up to the moment.

Then followed such an experience as we have seldom gone through. The first faint notes of the violin rose upon the air and stole through the room, and seemed to wait upon the silence without breaking it. A true master hand was wielding the bow: one of those who are born once in a century, and whose gift seems to have come down to them straight from heaven itself.

Quietly, solemnly, the notes fell lingeringly upon the silence. It was no set composition, but evidently an improvisation born of the moment: the expression of the mind and soul of the player. Now calm and subdued and quiet as an autumn evening, suggesting pastoral delights, the peace and repose of twilight, and the majesty of a star-gemmed sky; now growing impassioned, full of fervour and eloquence, full of change and activity, insensibly calling up the image of a bark tossed to and fro upon the restless ocean, typical of our storm-beaten life.

The whole soul of the player seemed to pass out in that wonderful music. He had evidently completely lost all count of time and place and circumstance. He played not to his hearers, but to an unseen audience. The very room seemed full of invisible beings from the spirit world. We, too, had left earth for the moment, and were, as the Canon had expressed it, in Paradise: lost in ecstasy, spellbound with a power beyond all description. The spirit of the player was abroad in the music, dominating our own spirit. On the Canon's face was an expression of rapture, as if the music to him was a prayer, a communing with things holy and beyond the veil. Adrien's face could only be dimly outlined, but its fervour was unmistakable, its oblivion to all things earthly and outward. The large, wonderful eyes now closed with the intensity of feeling, now opened wide with an upward gaze, as if they saw a vision of beauty denied to others: as though, like St. Cecilia, with his melody he drew angels down.

And then it ceased. The last notes died away upon the air, and for a short time there was absolute silence. Then we felt that the evening was over, and we quietly said goodbye and departed. The Canon accompanied us to the door, we passed out into the night, and the portal closed upon us.

The streets were silent and deserted. Not a light gleamed from any lattice window. We went straight down the Rue de Kéréon, and the quaint old gables were distinctly outlined against the night sky. We came to the Steir, and the stream looked dark and tranquil, flowing beneath the houses. All reflections were lost in the blackness, and it was too narrow even to give back the stars that were shining above so brilliantly. Not a soul was abroad but ourselves; the cafés were all closed, the whole town seemed slumbering. Our footsteps alone woke the echoes.

We turned on to the Boulevard, where the larger river flowed quietly and the trees rustled gently in the night air, and soon gained our hotel. A sleepy porter opened to us, lighted our candles, and wished us "la bonne nuit." We made our way up the winding staircase, that looked old and dirty enough to have been mediæval, and down the long, clumsy passages. The scene from our windows was all shrouded in darkness; the sea of grey roofs was hidden; but the spires of the Cathedral could still be faintly outlined in all their beauty.

Sunday morning came round in its course, bringing with it blue skies and sunshine. The hour approached for the Canon's sermon, and we made our way to the Cathedral. Already it was thronged with men and women, and on many a face it was easy to read eagerness and expectation. André, near the west doorway when we entered, quickly spied us out and marshalled us up the centre aisle to the seat he had reserved for us near the choir gates.

We have no space here to record one of the most remarkable sermons we had ever listened to. It must suffice to say that the key-note of the whole discourse, much of the force with which he swayed that great multitude, was the power of SYMPATHY. With this, combined, it is true, with rare intellectual vigour, he brought his truths so home to the hearts of his hearers that all were impressed and many were deeply moved. Providence had been kind to him in directing his destiny; he was born for the sacred oratory of the pulpit. We could have listened to him for hours. During the whole hour that it lasted, absolute stillness seemed to possess the congregation; and when it came to an end, and the preacher's voice was no longer heard penetrating to the distant aisles and arches, the hushed silence of emotion reigned for a few moments.

So we had had our wish, and it had been more than realised. And when, before the meridian of another day, we had left Quimper behind us for the little town of Audierne and the wild coast of Finistère, there still rang in our ears the persuasive arguments of the great preacher; and, coming in as an undertone, the celestial music of a matchless player.

## A SILENT GRAVE.

AMONG the million graves scattered all over the broad face of the earth there is perhaps not a more silent one than the green mound surrounded by laurel and pine which, in 1837, was raised over the remains of a woman unknown to all, save one, and which is still tended by the grateful hands of the descendants of that dead woman's faithful servant.

Although but half a century has elapsed since her death, it would be utterly impossible at the present day that a secret could be guarded so effectually that the life and death of an individual of consequence could be effaced from the present and the future, as it was done in the case of the occupant of that silent grave. The evergreen mound is situated on a hill on the outskirts of Hildburghausen, not far from Coburg, in the heart of Germany, once a thriving city with a Court, but which is now sinking into insignificance.

In the spring of 1807, a gentleman, a young lady, and a valet, arrived at Hildburghausen in a chaise and pair, and after staying some time in the only good hotel of the place, took a house in a retired street and lived in complete privacy for three years; only exchanging the town house during the summer heat for a small country seat on the hillside, which the gentleman had purchased shortly after his arrival.

The manner in which the family lived, the unstinting outlay, and the respectful way in which the valet spoke of his master, impressed the people of Hildburghausen with the fact that the new arrivals must be persons of consequence, and the titles of Count and Countess were applied to them, although there had never been an official intimation that the strangers had any right to be so called.

The valet gave his name as *Squarre*, and his master's as Vavel de Versay, and all the many packets that arrived by post, chiefly from Frankfort, were addressed to that name.

During all the three years of the mysterious couple's stay at Hildburghausen, curiosity was on tiptoe; but the curiosity of those days was not so effectual as is the thirst for knowledge of the newspaper reporters of our day, and nothing was revealed that could in any way satisfy the good people of the little town. Madame never walked out, and in all her drives was thickly veiled. Still, the elastic step, the lithesome figure, the graceful curve of the neck, showed her to be quite young; certainly not more than eighteen, the people thought; although she was taller than average women. No one ever saw more of her than that—no female servants having been engaged, except a cook, who was never allowed to enter a room, and whose work was confined within the precincts of her kitchen.

At that time the centre of the Court of Meiningen was Princess Charlotte, a handsome, accomplished woman, whom the men of letters of that day revered as a protectress of science and the arts. She gave quite a lustre to the little town. This Princess found means of intimating to the "Count" that if he and his lady cared to present themselves at Court they should be warmly welcomed. The Count answered politely, and with the form of a man of the world, that the lady's health was such that it admitted of no society duties or pleasures; and a few weeks afterwards, Count, Countess, valet, cook, and chaise, had disappeared from Hildburghausen altogether.

About an hour-and-a-half from Hildburghausen there is a small town called Eishausen, and, a good bit beyond the last houses of this place, a castle which was known by the people as the "Baronial Hall."

This castle, with its fine stone staircase, its twenty-five rooms, its cellars and lofts, large enough to shelter comfortably twenty persons at least, became the home of our mysterious family. Lord and lady lived in the upper storey; a common dining-room with fine ornaments and half-a-dozen windows being the centre, from which extended two wings—one for the lady, the other for the gentleman. Below were the kitchen and the lodging for Squarre, the valet, and the cook who had become his wife.

In these apartments the mysterious Count lived forty years in all, the Countess having died ten years before him; whilst Squarre only lived about eight years in Eishausen, and was succeeded by another man-servant.

In all those years the lady's face was not once seen by anyone, and no information was obtained concerning the Count's past, or the cause of his concealment. Of course, the police sought to fathom the mystery; but its summonses to the Count were regularly answered by cheques of high amount to be devoted to public charities, with the intimation that if the stranger's affairs were persistently pried into, he would leave that part of the country altogether. We therefore find in the registers of those days, many references to the "benefactor" of the district, whose wish for privacy must be respected. The gifts received from him, for public institutions, during his forty years' stay in Eishausen, are known to have amounted to several hundred thousand thalers; and this liberality on a large scale did not prevent the Count from extending private charity to the poor in his neighbourhood. At Easter he clothed twelve girls and twelve boys for their confirmation; he enabled several youths of the town to pursue a course of studies at a university; and at Christmas, not a poor man's house in the whole district was without a present from the "Count." The Princess induced him to pay a yearly contribution towards the maintenance of an industrial school; and, following the advice not to look a gift-horse in the mouth, signed his contributions for him in this

mysterious manner: "From a man who is known to the country by his generous deeds only."

The Count's expenses were considerable. Besides paying uncommonly high wages, for those parts and those times, to his servants, he kept a woman whose sole occupation was to fetch and carry between the castle and the market town. Packets of letters and books arrived almost daily; all the good things that were to be had, for love or money, were purchased in town and country and delivered into the kitchen of the castle. From afar came bags of Mocha, casks of cognac, boxes of choice sauterne, port wine, preserved fruit, and other delicacies.

Two bowls of soup, which were served for breakfast every day, had to be prepared out of three pounds of meat. Every dish was served on silver, but was deposited by the valet in the ante-room, and carried by the Count's own hands into the dining-room—who again removed it in the same manner. Not once in all the thirty years of the lady's life at Eishausen was an exception made to this rule.

Among the things which the carrier-woman fetched from the post were innumerable boxes of dresses, bonnets, and all the paraphernalia of a fine lady's toilet. Not a month passed but a new dress, a bonnet, boots and shoes, arrived from Paris. Happily, the castle was furnished with enormous wardrobes and presses, and these were found, after the lady's death, filled with hundreds of fine gowns, scarcely ever worn, but faded and crumpled. At home the lady wore the simplest of dresses, an apron, a fichu, and a cap—all her finery was donned for the drives, when the thick veil never failed to form the conspicuous feature in her dress.

But she did not drive out every day. For her daily exercise the Count had leased a plot of ground near the house, with shady trees and bushes, which was surrounded by a high fence, protected overmore by thick hedges, and provided with a gate that was always locked. It was the carrier-woman's duty to escort the lady to this place, called a garden. With the key of the gate in her hand, she had to wait outside the door, her back turned to it. At a given sign she marched on, the lady, deeply veiled, behind her. When she had unlocked the gate she turned her back again, and, after admitting the lady and locking the gate, went back to the house, outside which she waited for about two hours, when the ceremony of opening and not looking was repeated, and the lady returned to her apartments.

All her movements, and all the lady's were watched by the Count, who stood at a window in the first floor, a loaded rifle leaning against the wall, and a telescope in his hand. When once a wandering labourer pried into the garden and tried the lock, the Count fired from the window to scare him away. The signal for her return was given by the lady, who threw up a delicate handkerchief, whereupon the Count ordered the carrier-woman to do her duty.

In the garden the lady was fond of humming snatches of melan-

choly songs to herself, and it was noted that whenever she forgot herself and sang in her natural, melodious voice, the Count ran down the stairs and across the lawn to the garden, and stopped her. She kept a number of cats and dogs, which she taught to drive in little dolls' chaises, and dressed after the fashion of children, and she also owned a barrel-organ—other occupations she seems to have had none, unless she cared to adorn her person with the enormous quantity of dresses and jewels which were her undisputed property, but which no one was there to admire. From all that can be gathered, there seems to have been very little communion between the Count and the lady, and in every action of his life, or of her doings, he appears to have been the guardian, she the prisoner—although it must be admitted that her prison bars were handsomely gilt.

The Count's life differed vastly from that of his lady. We have already referred to the quantity of books he continually received. After his death a splendid library was found in his apartments.

The carrier-woman once casually remarked that in past days she often took books to the clergyman of the village at about twenty minutes' distance from the castle.

A few days later the Count sent her to the clergyman in question with a book and a letter, in which he begged the learned gentleman to read the work and give him his opinion "on the back of this letter, if you will be so kind."

This was the beginning of a most interesting intercourse which lasted twenty-five years between the Count and the clergyman, and was continued by the widow, after that gentleman's death, for fifteen more years, when the Count died.

In all those years the Count never forgot to ask for the answer on the back of his own letter, so that the clergyman's family does not possess one line of his writing. On most matters the two learned men agreed, but a controversy often arose and was carried on with so much energy that the messenger woman had to walk from castle to rectory and back ten times in a day. The Count sometimes met the man with whose mind he was so intimately acquainted, but he never saluted him otherwise than by a distant bow. The clergyman told his friends that the mysterious Count was certainly the most cultivated and the cleverest man he had ever met, and this opinion is corroborated by persons of position who spoke with him after the lady's death; so that it is an undoubted fact that we have a man of consequence before us, who was selected by the powerful of his country to carry out a difficult, dangerous, nay, almost an impossible mission.

The Countess died on the 25th of November, 1837. The Count had grown old by this time and seems to have abandoned his post at the window, to peruse one of his beloved books. He was so taken up by the contents that he did not see the usual signal, and forgot all about his charge until ten o'clock, when he searched for

her in her rooms. The daily recurrence of the same order of things might have deceived him into the belief that she had, as usually, returned. She was found in the garden in a fainting fit, wet through, and never recovered from the illness which ensued. Although she was out of her mind on the following day, no doctor was called, but the Count gave her a nurse, the old messenger woman who had been in his service twenty-five years by this time.

At the end of three weeks the lady died, and the Count ordered her to be dressed in a white satin dress, and yellow kid shoes over white silk stockings, and she was carried back to the country house near Hildburghausen, her favourite resort. The Count was not present at the funeral, but watched the melancholy procession from the windows of the castle. He was busy taking care of the old carrier-woman, at whose disposition he placed two well-furnished rooms, whom he provided with all that could cheer her old age, but whom he did not allow to speak one word to any outsider for the rest of her life. She died at the end of eight years, and during all this time the Count hid the key of her door in his pocket, and she did not eat a morsel that was not brought into her room by the Count's own hands.

The usual forms were observed after the death of the mysterious lady: all her property was sealed up in her apartments, and her companion was called upon to give her name and that of her presumable heirs. He refused to do any such thing, persisted he had a right to all that belonged to her, and promised that after his death everything that was left should go to the poor of the district. When the police insisted, and at the end of an animated discussion, his impatience and alarm wrung from him the words:

"No power on earth shall tear my secret from me—I take it into the grave with me."

A few days later he wrote to the authorities that the deceased was Sophie Botta, unmarried, of plebeian descent, and fifty-eight years old. No one believed him, but a handsome sum for the poor accompanied the information, so that the name was booked, and the seals were taken away from the apartments.

The Count never visited the lady's grave, and a part of his watchfulness was given up after her death. But he lived the same life as formerly and trusted no one, communicated with no one except by writing. The only exception he made was to summon an eminent physician of those days to his bedside, to whom he said that it was not so much his advice as a doctor that he required, but that he wished to confide to him a secret that burdened his soul beyond endurance. The conversation lasted five hours, but not one word of his secret did he reveal, and the physician was not called a second time. The evidence of this man, who is one of the first of his time, is valuable above that of all others who knew the Count. He stated that the Frenchman made the impression of a statesman living in the

capital of the world, primed with all the knowledge of past and present days, with an eye that saw clearly through the world's politics, and that whoever saw him could not for a moment suppose this was the hermit who had lived nearly forty years at Eishausen in absolute solitude.

The physician asked him why he had not been called to attend the lady when she was so dangerously ill, and the Count answered: "I could not do it—you cannot conceive what a terrible responsibility I should have laid upon you had I called you to the bedside of that lady!"

About a year later the Count, who felt himself weak and old by this time, began to prepare for the end. He burnt letters and papers in enormous quantities, and even sent for a lawyer of renown because he wished to make a will. But scarcely had the messenger departed, when a second one was sent after him to call him back. This undecided manœuvre was repeated several times and was never allowed to have any practical effect, and one day in the fortieth year of his life in those parts, the Count died after a short illness, and without revealing one word of his secret.

Before dying, he said that the authorities would find his papers in perfect order, and that if his death was published in all the papers of Germany, his relations would come and see after his property and liberally provide for his servants. The last promise was never fulfilled. In his papers the name by which he had been known for so long, but which he had never signed, was not found; every document in the house belonged to one Von der Valk, a Dutchman, whose relations answered the advertisement in the papers; who afterwards received all that had been left, and gave to the servants as small a share as possible.

Of the old people, no one survived; Squarre had been dead long ago; his wife had followed him into the grave, and there was only their daughter, who has been twice married, and who to this day lives in the little house on the hill given to her parents by the Count in the early days of Eishausen. This woman still lovingly tends the Countess' grave, and keeps the laurels and roses in as perfect order as if they thrived under the hand of a royal head gardener. The Count is buried in the village graveyard, close to the last resting place of his spiritual friend, the village clergyman. It is from Squarre's daughter that the only information can now be obtained concerning the Countess, whom she often saw in the days of her childhood. She describes the lady as having been uncommonly tall, with a majestic bearing that, according to her words, "cannot be imitated by anyone not as highly born." In her coffin, although nearly sixty years old, she looked very handsome; and, although her blue eyes were closed for ever, there was light in her face. She wore her hair short, "à la Titus," and rarely smiled, and then very sadly.

About two years before the stranger's first appearance in Hildburg-

hausen, there lived in Zugelfingen a gentleman and lady who answer exactly the description of these two in the days of their youth. Here, also, the lady walked about thickly veiled, except upon one occasion when she was freely breathing the air of a neighbouring forest. A little boy was sitting at the edge of a brook, and she bent down and smiled at him, so that he took courage and lifted his hand to caress her face. The gentleman approached in great alarm, and threw the veil over her face. Some months later, this boy, who had often been romancing about the meeting with the mysterious stranger, was shown a number of engravings by his drawing-master, when suddenly he took up a portrait of the Duchess of Angoulême and declared her to be his lady of the wood.

On the ground of this assertion, it has been supposed that the mysterious lady was none other than Marie Thérèse, Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette's daughter, who, with her parents, her aunt Elisabeth, and her brother, was taken to the temple, a prisoner of the nation. It was afterwards said that one of the ladies who visited the royal family exchanged places with her, and thus enabled her to fly to a convent. But it is certain that three years later the royal Princess was liberated and received in Vienna with all the honours due to her rank. She afterwards married the Duc d' Angoulême and died at Frohsdorf, in 1851, at the age of seventy-three.

But even supposing that the fiction of her flight be correct, and the lady who died at Frohsdorf an impostor, where would be the reason for her concealment unto death, which, besides the sacrifice of the "Count's" life, has cost many millions? Nothing was to be lost by her appearance, nothing to be gained by her concealment. For such unswerving energy, for so firm a purpose upheld for a whole lifetime, there must have been a powerful motive, which sanctioned all means that led to its successful accomplishment.

This powerful motive is absolutely out of the question in the case of Princess Marie Thérèse de Bourbon, and yet all the inquiries and suppositions concerning the occupant of the mysterious grave have led to no more probable result. The story of those two French exiles, although true, is withal so romantic that it induced the writer of these lines to speculate unceasingly upon a solution of the mystery. There are no proofs whatsoever that the occupant of the grave is really a woman, and the moment we suppose it to be a man the mystery is not so difficult to unravel. My reasons for believing the so-called Countess to have been a man are, first the imprisonment of the woman who had acted as nurse, who was sure to have found out the patient's sex, and was not allowed to speak a word to anyone until death released her from her prison. Another reason is, the responsibility which the doctor would have incurred had he been called to her bedside. By not calling a doctor when his companion was sick unto death, the Count committed a crime, the responsibility of which he would not have taken upon himself had not a single visit from the doctor

threatened to reveal the secret for which he had sacrificed his life. The Count was observed to have silenced the lady whenever she raised her voice enough to be heard by others than himself. According to every available testimony the two had nothing in common, no occupations, no sentiments; they do not even appear to have been intimate — a very improbable fact to last thirty years had they been man and woman. In what the lady left behind her there was nothing to reveal a woman—no work that might have beguiled her many idle and tedious hours, no traces of female vanity, no graceful adornments of her luxuriously-furnished apartments. The ridiculous quantity of costly garments would appear to have been ordered for the sole purpose of maintaining the fiction, that a lady of rank was the occupant of the castle at Eishausen. The short hair, the tall figure and vigorous frame also speak in favour of the assumption that it is a man whom we have to seek under the mask of the Countess; and if a man, why not Louis XVII., whom the shoemaker with whom he had been apprenticed might for a bribe have given up, and stated to have died before he was ten years old? The age of the Countess coincides exactly with the age of that unfortunate young prince, who was born in 1785, and must then, in 1807, have been twenty-two years old, when the Countess first appeared in Hildburghausen, a handsome, tall young lady of not more than twenty. The improbability of Louis XVII.'s death was so great, that four pretenders to his name arose and found partisans to support them. There seems to have been no doubt that Louis XVII. was backward in the development of his mind, and it might have been for this reason, or perhaps out of personal ambition, that Louis XVIII., his uncle and successor, kept him concealed. No lesser person than a monarch could have furnished Count Vavel de Versay with the means of keeping up his establishment during more than forty years, and successfully baffling every research for his origin. And might not brother and sister have resembled each other enough to have justified the boy's exclamation, who recognized the Countess in the portrait of the Duchess d'Augoulême?

Perhaps when the belief that a woman is buried in the grave at Hildburghausen has been abandoned, other traces may be found that will prove the identity of Louis XVII., and another fact in History will have been established.

BETTINA WIRTH.

# HELEN'S LOVER.

## I.

"I MAY seem to you, my love, to dwell on this point too fully, but in this I follow Baum, who, in his tractate '*De Thucydidis Erroribus*,' discourses on this battle at length. Are you listening, Helen?"

"Yes, grandfather dear."

But she spoke dreamily, leaning forward with her hands clasped about her knees.

How near the hills appeared in the clear, pale light. She could see the road winding upwards, and the narrow sheep-tracks through the bracken and the heather. Was it only yesterday that she had come home again? Had she really been away? Or was it all unreal, a trick of the imagination, like the battle her grandfather had been talking of?

He was still talking. Had she glanced up from her low seat at his knees, she would have been startled to see the strained, intense look in his face.

"It is a great opportunity. It is more than I had a right to expect. I told the Dean so. I wish you could have seen him, Helen."

"He is very kind," she answered. There was a waggon on the road now, toiling up the steep ascent, the only touch of human life in all the wide, bare landscape. How free and open the outlook was from their cottage. How fresh the air that blew across the moorland. She loved, as one born among them, the gray barrenness of the moors, the stern grandeur of the granite tors. It made her heart leap up to look upon them again. But even as she looked, a far different scene rose before her. A sheltered, wooded coombe running down to the sea; an old garden, gay with summer flowers. Talk going on while she sat silent: talk of books and people all unknown to her—Ibsen, Tolstoi, Tourgenieff. And not a word of the great names her grandfather had taught her to love. She had sat silent, listening eagerly to the brilliant, eager talk. Her clever hostesses had taken no trouble to amuse her, but Helen never found out their neglect. It was all so new and wonderful at first. And then had come the consciousness that, outsider as she was in all their conversation, the most brilliant talker of them all was thinking of *her* while he talked to the others.

Her visit ended yesterday. It was at the very end of it, in the moment of parting, that the words were said that she remembered most of all. He had told her she would soon see him again; he was going almost directly to her county town, within a drive of her home,

and he wanted to see her home. With these words in her ears, with her whole being tremulous in sweet, shy expectancy, she found it difficult to listen to her grandfather's hopes and fears about his work; she failed to understand what a hungry, feverish, torturing passion the ambition of an old man may become. Hope long deferred had not quenched desire. As he turned over the pages of the manuscript before him there was an exulting sense in him of the power of his work. Once given to the world it must command success. He had failed to get it published. He had failed so often that for years he had not made a new attempt. He was miserably poor; he had no friends to give him a lifting hand, and the book was of interest only to the select few who care for scholarship. But at last a chance had been afforded him. The Dean of the little cathedral city over the hills had become interested in the work. Mr. Tristram had sent a portion for his inspection, and the Dean had held out hopes of getting the book published by a learned society of which he was president. This had happened during Helen's absence. Since her return her grandfather had been able to talk of little else. The fruition of his hopes seemed certain to him at last. He had just been reading to her the chapters he had copied to send to the Dean.

"I shall take the whole manuscript with me on Thursday," he said, laying his hand lovingly on the bulky mass. "The Dean may want it. If I had only made his acquaintance years ago, Helen, we should not be living here now."

"I love the place," said Helen. "We could not like another home so well."

Her grandfather smoothed the bright hair that lay against his knee.

"You are a good, contented child," he said. "But we are out of the world here. It has been all very well for the time, but we will make a change now. How would you like to live near London, Helen?"

"I don't think I should like it at all."

"Or near Oxford? The Bodleian in some ways is better than the British Museum. Tom would like Oxford, my dear." Something in his eager, hopeful tone struck through Helen with a keen pang. She turned round and looked fondly, repentantly up in her grandfather's thin, flushed face. How could she have been thinking of anything but this great news of his?

"Oh, grandfather dear, I don't mind where we live as long as you have what you want."

"That's my own little Helen. But let us get this book published, love, and everything else will follow," was his answer.

It was a long, hilly drive to the cathedral town. They walked to the main road and then the carrier's cart drove them slowly up the long ascent to the top of the moors, and then down into the rich lowlands where the grey towers of the cathedral rose beside the river. The

Deanery was close under the shadow of those massive towers; a low-browed, gabled house. Helen was never again in that long, narrow drawing-room, whose fine windows looked upon the green turf of the cathedral close. But to the end of her life she would be able to call up in clear, definite vision, the memory-picture of the room, with its white panelled walls and ceiling garlanded with moulded flowers; with its high glass-domed bookcases, its slender century-old chairs and tables, its wealth of blue china. They had been invited to lunch at the Deanery, and they were too early. The Dean had not come in. They were shown into the drawing-room, and left to wait there. Mr. Tristram peered about in his helpless, short-sighted way to find a table empty enough to afford room for his manuscript; but in the end sat down in one of the more substantial chairs, holding it on his knees. Helen took her seat on one of the cushioned window-sills and let her eyes rest on the carved richness of the cathedral's western front. The door opened behind her, and a young man entered and advanced a few steps before either Helen or Mr. Tristram had become aware of his presence.

"I think I must introduce myself," he was beginning, when Helen turned and hastily rose. He stopped, flushing up to the roots of his dark, closely-cropped hair.

"Miss Mainwaring," he faltered. He looked thoroughly discomposed. Helen kept her self-possession in a way that made her secretly marvel at herself. She introduced him to her grandfather with quiet composure.

"Mr. Reynolds, a friend of my cousins', grandpapa. We met at Rosedale."

Mr. Reynolds did not regain his self-command, though they sat and chatted for some moments before the Dean came in. He said to Helen as they crossed the hall to the dining-room:

"I had no idea that Mr. Tristram was your grandfather, or that the Miss Tristram the Dean spoke of, was *you*.

"I had two grandfathers," she answered lightly. "And the Dean is wrong about my name."

"I wish I had known," he said.

"Why?"

He laughed uneasily. The Dean had stopped to show Mr. Tristram some coins that hung in a case on the wall, and he stopped, too, and looked down at her with a half-amused, half-annoyed expression on his keen, clear-cut face.

"Don't you see?" he said. "Don't you realise the rôle I am playing to-day?"

"My grandfather's critic?"

"Yes. It is greatness thrust upon me. The Dean was peremptory."

Helen looked up at him with a quick trembling of the lips. How could he speak so lightly? She felt miserably hurt. But nothing

more could be said. The Dean had finished his remarks, and they went on into the dining-room. Helen scarcely heard the polite nothings the Dean addressed to her in his suave, courtly way. She answered him almost at random, keeping her eyes on her plate. "A gauche little country girl," was the Dean's verdict. He felt a strong inclination to yawn as lunch went on. His visitors bored him. He wanted them to go that he might discuss them with John Reynolds. It must amuse him to meet such a queer character as this old pedant. How he was drawing him out.

Mr. Tristram was talking very freely. He was too excited to eat much, and John Reynolds was an attentive listener. Helen, listening with painful eagerness to their conversation, felt her cheeks grow hot with angry pain. She was conscious that Mr. Reynolds was secretly laughing at her grandfather's remarks, while he listened with a grave face and attentive eyes. She caught the tone of pitying superiority in his brief answers. She saw how carefully he avoided looking at the Dean. Her heart burnt within her with bitter resentment.

They had coffee in the drawing-room after luncheon. The Dean brought out some books of rare prints for Helen to look over.

"And we will go into the library for a little chat," he said, addressing Mr. Tristram, who was moving uneasily about with his manuscript under one arm. His face flushed up with eagerness. He made hurried progress to the door.

Helen's anxious eyes followed him, and as he passed out her glance fell on Reynolds, who was standing near the door. He had made no attempt to speak to her since they had come back to the drawing-room. He had even avoided looking at her. He was leaning lightly against the panelled wall with a look of unmistakable annoyance on his keen, dark face. He did not notice Helen's glance. He passed out after Mr. Tristram, shrugging his shoulders at some inward thought as he did so, and Helen sat down before her book of prints.

She turned over the thick pages, seeing nothing as she did so. What a long while they were away. What were they saying to her grandfather? Was this the meeting she had so eagerly, so fondly, so foolishly waited for?

These were the thoughts that throbbed through her as she waited.

At last there was the sound of footsteps. A moment after, the Dean came into the room, his sleek face much perturbed.

"Miss Tristram, I fear your grandfather is ill. Will you come to him?"

Helen hurried out. Her grandfather was already in the hall buttoning his coat with shaking fingers.

"He is better," said Mr. Reynolds quickly. He was standing near the old man, but not addressing him.

"Come, Helen," her grandfather said, in a high, sharp tone. "It is time for us to go."

She went quickly up to him, slipping her hand through his arm.

"You had better wait a little," said the Dean; though while he spoke, he allowed the servant to open the door.

"Let us go, let us go!" the old man said with feverish eagerness. He turned to Mr. Reynolds.

"You may be right, but—but ——"

"Oh, do come, grandfather dear," exclaimed Helen, frightened at his excited look as he turned towards the younger man.

"Don't you think you had better wait?" the Dean said again.

She shook her head as she held out her hand to say good-bye.

"I shall see your grandfather again," said the Dean gently. Her face made him pitiful. "When he is calm, you know."

Helen did not speak. She shook hands with Reynolds and hurriedly joined her grandfather, who had gone down the steps and was waiting on the gravel walk. They went along the path and out at the arched gateway. Mr. Tristram hurried along, leaning on Helen. He looked a feeble, broken-down old man.

"I am glad to get him off, to tell the truth," said the Dean, with an uneasy laugh. "I was afraid of a fit. Who could have thought he would have taken it to heart like this?"

"How will they get home?" his companion asked. He had gone out on the doorstep to watch them down the narrow street.

"Oh, the carrier's cart, I suppose," returned the Dean carelessly "they are horribly poor. I owe you a turn, Reynolds, for saving me from being mixed up in the business. I really believed in the old fellow, you know."

"You seem to wilfully misunderstand me," returned his companion, coming back into the cool, flower-lit hall. "It's a scholarly book—a great book in its way, most probably—but it takes no account of modern researches, which makes it useless. You were too hard upon him."

"Why, didn't you tell me yesterday that it was rubbish, not worth the paper it was written on?"

"No, I didn't. I said it was obsolete, and, as it stands, not much better than waste paper."

"Well, that means exactly the same; I may not have quoted your words, but I conveyed the sense of them to him. Where are you going?"

"Where does the carrier's cart start from?"

"Nonsense. I claim a game of chess from you."

"Somebody ought to look after them."

But he hesitated as he spoke and drew a step or two back.

"Oh, they will be all right. That girl looks sensible. It is a pity she has such awkward manners. But they are buried in the country, poor things."

"How far from the town do they live?"

"Oh, a dozen or so miles. But come, let us get to our game. We mustn't forget the Bishop's garden party."

If Mr. Reynolds had had any idea of following Helen he gave it up and had his game of chess with the Dean. He was badly beaten, to his host's great triumph.

"I believe I am a match for you, after all," he chuckled, as he swept the pieces into the box. But his opponent had played almost at random. He was thinking intently of his own next move in the game of life.

He had come to the town with a definite purpose. He had made up his mind to ask Helen Mainwaring to marry him. She loved him, he was almost sure of that, and he had fallen passionately in love with her. But to-day's events had been a shock to him. He was an ambitious man, a man who had climbed the first few difficult rounds of fortune's ladder and felt the next was easy if he made no false steps.

He had believed that his marriage with Helen would satisfy his brain as well as his heart. He knew her rich, clever cousins well. He had expected to find Helen on terms of equality with the best people she lived among; he had counted on meeting her at the Bishop's garden-party that afternoon. Why, of course, she must be there. So he had said to himself. To meet her as he had met her at the Dean's was a shock his love was scarcely able to stand.

And Helen herself? It had disillusioned him to find her so shy, so awkward, so ill at ease. It was her gracious dignity of manner, her serene, sweet unconsciousness of self that had singled her out for him, star-like, amongst those clever women at Rosedale. But the Dean's laughing criticisms were true enough for Helen as she had appeared to-day.

He had intended to call on her at once, but he would not do that now; he would put it off a day or two. So he decided as the Dean checkmated him.

## II.

THE days went fast at the Deanery. The Dean was proud of his distinguished young visitor, and lost no opportunity of drawing him into the society of the place. The Bishop had a clever daughter, and he and Reynolds found a great deal to say to each other.

One evening, nearly a week after Helen's visit to the Deanery, the two men sat smoking by the fire before going to bed. They had been dining at the palace, and Reynolds had been the life of the party.

"You know the Bishop's first wife was a Carisford?" said the Dean, apropos of nothing.

"Was she?"

"Yes, that girl of hers has brilliant connections. A good fortune, too. The man who marries her will do well."

"Possibly."

"There's nothing that affects a man's future like his marriage," went on the Dean earnestly. He glanced sideways at his companion, who was looking steadily into the fire, with compressed lips and frowning eyes.

It was the next day that John Reynolds saw Helen again. He was with the Bishop's daughter. They had met at a tennis-party and were coming home together down the High Street, with their rackets in their hands.

Reynolds was talking lightly to his companion, and she was laughing merrily, when they came suddenly face to face with Helen, who had just come out of a shop.

She had a basket in her hand and she was most simply and plainly dressed.

She passed them quickly, bowing slightly as she did so. Reynolds raised his hat and went on with his broken sentence.

His companion noticed no difference in his manner. She never guessed how wildly his heart was beating. How his whole nature was shaken through and through at the sight of that slight girl in the shabby dress and old-fashioned hat.

If John Reynolds had known how Helen had waited for him to come, day after day, till her love seemed to sicken, to die, to change to very hate; he could not have cursed his folly more as he walked beside his gay companion, answering her remarks with remarks as gay.

He left her at her door and hurried back along the street. But Helen had vanished.

Next morning he told the Dean that he intended to call on Mr. Tristram that day.

His host tried to laugh him out of it, and then suddenly agreed that it was a kind thing to do. Why should they not make up a party? Let him wait till the next day.

But Reynolds started off directly after breakfast. He was eager to condone his long delay. It was noon before he had climbed the long, up-hill road that led from the lowlands to the shoulder of the grey peak that looked down on Helen's home. From its highest point the road sloped steeply for awhile till the level of the bare, undulating moorland was reached, then it wound along with wide stretches of heath and gorse on each side, keeping step with a little brown brook that bubbled out of the side and sang its way across the moors.

The road passed a few hundred yards from the cottage, and a footpath, paved with short velvety grass, led upwards to the white gate in the low stone fence.

He walked up the path, and seeing neither bell nor knocker, rapped sharply on the painted door. There was only the pause of a moment. Then a light step sounded on the flagged passage and the door was opened by Helen herself. She was startled, but she did not show it. She looked at him with bright calm eyes.

"How kind of you to call," she said. She hesitated a moment and then came out in the porch, shutting the door behind her.

"My grandfather has just fallen asleep," she said, with that clear, steady light in her eyes. "I am afraid to ask you to come in, for the sound of a strange voice might wake him. Would you come into the garden?"

She stepped before him with the gesture of a young princess asking a subject to enter the royal domains. Reynolds followed her down the narrow path to the plot of grass near the entrance gate. An ash tree grew there, its shadow falling on Helen's face as she turned to him. She looked on the ground a second, and then her eyes met his again with that cool friendliness which so annoyed him.

"You must let me get you some lunch. You have had a long walk."

"I should like to see your grandfather," he answered, declining to notice her offer of lunch; "will he sleep long?"

Helen's hands met with a nervous gesture. "I am sorry," she said, "but he is not well. He must not see anyone."

Slowly, and with difficulty, Mr. Reynolds' mind travelled back to the events of last week. He had thought so little of Helen's grandfather. "He seemed much excited that day," he said; "I don't think he understood us."

"That was scarcely your fault, was it?" she returned.

He looked at her with a sudden lightening of his face. "You are angry with me."

"Then I am very unreasonable."

He had always admired her clear, finely-toned voice. It was clear as a silver bell as she answered, and her eyes looked coldly and calmly at him.

"You *are* angry," he faltered. When had he lost his self-possession before? He had had great events, great successes, great excitements in his life, but his heart had never beat as it was beating now, as he looked humbly, imploringly at Helen. "I did what your grandfather himself must recognise as the best and kindest thing, I told him the truth. Would you have had me deceive him?"

"We will not discuss it." She turned slightly from him, leaning her elbow on the wall and looking across the moor. "Tell me what you think of our country here, Mr. Reynolds. It is your first visit, I think?"

"Do you suppose I am going to discuss the scenery with you?" His voice was shaken with angry feeling. "What is my offence? Tell me plainly."

She lifted her delicate eyebrows as she glanced at him. He had never seen her do that before. It pointed her quiet words, making them strike deep.

"There is no offence."

He drew a step nearer her. He put his hand on the wall close to hers, but not touching it.

"You shall make me understand," he said. "Look at me, Helen." She drew herself upright, bringing her hands together in a close clasp, and raised her steady eyes to meet his glance.

"I do not wish to speak of it," she said. "My grandfather and I have decided what to do. It was right for you to tell him. I acknowledge that."

"Then why do you blame me?"

She looked at him in silence. He saw her lips tremble, her eyes fill. It gave him courage to go on.

"Think of *me* a moment. You know what I have come to say."

She made a quick gesture. "I beg of you to be silent."

"You will not hear me?" His face grew white to the lips.

"You will be glad afterwards," she said quickly. "Let our pleasant friendship end pleasantly."

"We have not been friends. We cannot be friends. You know it. I love you." He stopped a moment, and then repeated the words—"I love you."

She had looked up at him, trying to keep her calmness, but it gave way. With a low "Oh, you should have been silent," she turned from him, covering her face with her hands, in a burst of bitter weeping. He stood silent. He put his hand on the wall to steady himself, for he was trembling violently. He had never faced the chance that she would refuse him. He could not face it now.

She checked her tears in a moment, and looked up at him, gently, pleadingly.

"I ought not to have let you speak," she said. "You would have thought of me more kindly. I wanted to part as friends."

He stopped a moment to choose his words. Wild, passionate appeals, bitter reproaches rose to his lips as he looked at her, but he could not utter them.

"Am I to go?" he said falteringly.

"Don't let us part in anger," she answered. She held out her hands to him.

"In anger?" He did not touch her hands. "Helen, Helen, do you know how I love you?"

"We must part." She spoke in a low voice. "I beg of you to say no more."

"Do you really mean it? I have been so certain that you loved me. Forgive me for saying so. But have I been wholly self-deceived?" He stopped a moment. "Are you sure, are you sure you do not love me?" he added, in a passionately imploring tone. "Give me a little hope."

"I cannot." The words were very low, but calm and steady.

He scanned her face for one line of doubt, of hesitation.

"You send me away?"

"I must."

He drew a long, deep breath. There was silence for a moment;

then he said, "I accept your answer. I accept it. But I want to understand. Have I been wrong all the time—a dupe of my own vanity? At Rosedale? I could swear you were beginning to love me then." She did not speak.

"Have I lost you through my tardiness? Be frank, Helen. You owe it to me."

She raised her head, with a touch of haughtiness in the gesture.

"I owe you an answer. You have had it."

"But I have disappointed you. Fallen short of the ideal you had up for me. Showed myself poor clay where you expected gold. You are right. Despise me; I deserve it. But I love you! I love you! Give me a little hope."

There was not a line of hesitation in the quiet, steady face she turned on him. "I have given you my answer," she said gently. "It is a final one. It is useless pain to both of us to continue this."

"You despise me?"

She looked at him with those deep, calm eyes. "Why should I? You were very kind to me. I do not forget it."

There was silence for a moment. Then she said, with her full look still resting on his agitated, miserable face:

"I must go in, Mr. Reynolds. I may be wanted."

"One moment," he exclaimed. He stood looking on the ground in intense, painful thought. Then he said in a low voice: "Tell me what you are going to do. You told me you had decided on something."

"Why should I trouble you with our plans?" she answered faintly.

"Ah, that is not like you. You should not have said that. Tell me."

"We are going to London. He is going to revise his book there."

He looked at her slim, delicate figure, her pale, sweet face. He had never loved her as he loved her now.

"Are you going alone, you two?"

"Of course. We have made our plans already. It is the only thing that comforts him."

"I won't keep you," he said. "I see you want to go. But I want you to promise me one thing. It is not much to ask."

"Tell me," she returned quietly.

"Promise to trust me as a friend when we meet again."

"Yes; I may promise that."

"Give me your hand on it." He took it and held it fast.

"You must go. Good-bye."

He dropped her hand and she left him. He watched her go; watched her along the path and into the house. Then he set out on his homeward walk. But before he reached the main road he sat down. He sat there a long time thinking intently. He was thinking of the future. He was making a choice; he had made it when at

last he rose and set his face towards the hills. It was late when he got back to the Deanery. He said little to the Dean about his day's expedition, and the private opinion of his host was that he had missed his road and was too proud to confess it.

Next day they were sitting smoking by the study fire just before dinner, and the Dean laughingly referred to his knocked-up look on reaching home the night before.

"You are no hill-man, my dear fellow. It is lucky Cambridge is so flat."

Mr. Reynolds was silent for a moment, then he put his pipe down and quietly said.

"I have refused the tutorship."

"Refused it? Impossible?"

"I wrote to-day to give it up."

He took up his pipe and began to smoke again, looking steadily at the fire.

"My dear fellow, are you in your right senses? You will never get such a chance again, never. It is suicide."

"Well, it's done."

"But what on earth has made you do such a thing?"

"Second thoughts," he returned shortly.

"But—but—what are you going to do?"

"Enter into Laban's service."

"I don't understand you."

"No? Well I don't understand myself quite," returned the other, with a queer, somewhat rueful, smile. "But the thing's done, Dean. Dead and done with, and I am going to begin all over again."

## III.

As Mr. Tristram put it, "They burnt their ships behind them." Like London or loathe it, they should have to stay there. The little moorland cottage was sold; all the old furniture was disposed of; only the books were kept. Some empty rooms were taken in a street near the British Museum, and furnished as cheaply as possible, and then they settled down. It was Helen's energy and determination that had done it all. It was Helen's bright spirit that kept the little home cheerful through the dark days of that long November. The fogs had come early, had come heavily. Day after day the streets were shrouded in that funereal pall which tires the fortitude of the most enthusiastic Londoners. To Helen, who hated towns at all times, who would have pined like a lark for the country in the splendour of a London June, those days of fog were days of slow torture. But she never repined, she never lost her ready smile, her merry speech. Mr. Tristram never guessed what life meant to her just then. He was well again, but not well enough to stay long at the Museum library. It was Helen's task to go there and copy out

the extracts he wanted. The book was to be thoroughly revised, and then Mr. Tristram would publish it at his own expense.

It would take nearly all their little stock of capital to do it, and he had feebly remonstrated when Helen had proposed the plan.

"I must think of you, my dear," he had said, though his eyes had grown bright with newly-renewed hope. But Helen had set her heart on seeing her grandfather's life-long wish accomplished.

"You have thought of me too much," she said, stroking the weak hand she held. "And I can do many things. Besides, what will the book do for us?"

"It must succeed," he answered eagerly. "Yes, you are right, my dear. I have been too faint-hearted. You have put new life in me, my own brave girl."

It was weary work. It became an almost hopeless work as the days went on, and the store of new material accumulated, and Helen saw that her grandfather no longer had strength enough to grapple with his task.

They had been in London nearly a month. The longest, dreariest month that Helen had ever known, ever would know. She had left her grandfather poring over his papers by the lamplight, and had picked her way through the dark wet streets to the Museum. Her grandfather had found a reference to some science magazine in one of his books, and he had asked her to copy a certain article for him. She had some difficulty in getting the magazine, and she was explaining what she wanted to a puzzled official, when she felt a light touch on her hand. She turned.

"Let me help you," said Mr. Reynolds in a quiet matter-of-fact tone; "the name of that paper is altered."

In a moment all difficulties vanished, and Helen went back to her seat, knowing the magazine would be brought to her in a few moments.

It took her a long time to copy the article, and she never raised her head or looked round while she laboured at her task.

Yet she was conscious that Mr. Reynolds was sitting busy at work, with a great pile of books around him, a few desks away.

The clock was striking six when she had finished. She carried back the book and then went swiftly out through the swinging doors. She was claiming her umbrella when Mr. Reynolds came up to claim his, and they went out together, through the dimly-lighted hall, into the foggy night. He stopped on the steps and held out his hand.

"You promised that we were to be friends," he said gravely.

That night Helen and her grandfather worked late. Helen felt more hopeless than she had ever felt about the prospects of the book, for her grandfather was obviously incapable of working in the new material properly. But her pity for him was only the deeper for this knowledge, and she toiled on by his side far into the night trying to get certain chapters finished. He gave up at last and sat down by the fire, rubbing his hands and looking bright and eager.

"We are getting on," he said jubilantly; "it will soon be over, my dear. A few more weeks, and we shall see the end of it."

Helen sat down by his side, on her low stool, and laid her head against him. She felt too sick at heart to be able to answer him in any other way. He smoothed down the soft, bright hair, but with an absent hand; his thoughts were busy. Helen was just thinking whether she should tell him she had met Mr. Reynolds that night, when he mentioned his name.

"I wonder where that fellow Reynolds is, my love; I should like to see him."

Helen gave a painful start. It was not the first time her grandfather's manner had struck her as strange, as so unlike his habitually reserved, formal ways. It was a moment or two before she could answer in her usual tone.

"It is strange you mention him, grandfather dear. I met him to-night in the library; I was just going to tell you so."

"I want to see him," her grandfather returned eagerly; "tell him so, Helen. I was unjust, absurd about him. He did me a good turn, didn't he?"

"He told you the truth."

"Yes; he put me on the right track. Why, we should be mouldering still in that place if it were not for him. A conceited fellow, too; a Cambridge prig, Helen."

Helen did not answer. She took up her grandfather's hand and pressed her lips on it.

"It will do him good to see my work now," the old man went on with a feeble chuckle; "eh, Helen? We can teach him somewhat now, can't we? You must bring him in to see me, my dear, next time you meet."

"I shall hardly see him again. He is a Cambridge lecturer, you know; he can't be in London often. It was the merest chance we met."

A day or two after this, Mr. Tristram went to the Museum alone. Helen had some household work to do, for they kept no servant. Long before his usual time for coming home she heard her grandfather's voice on the stairs, loud and cheerful, as his voice had become lately. Someone must be with him. They were so absolutely friendless in London, that Helen could think of no one, except—except—but he it could not be. She took off her apron and wiped the flour off her hands and went into the front room. Her grandfather opened the door as she came in from the inner room, and looked at her with a triumphant smile.

"Here is Mr. Reynolds, Helen. Come in, come in," he exclaimed, turning round and beckoning to his companion.

Helen and Mr. Reynolds shook hands in silence.

"Now I will show you what I have been doing," went on Mr. Tristram, in his loud voice. He went up to the table and began to fling over the papers. "Helen, come here, my dear. Where's that

section I altered yesterday? You won't say we are behind the times now, Reynolds. Just look here."

He began explaining the pages he took up, but almost immediately dropped them and went off to his bedroom to get some book he wanted to show his visitor.

Mr. Reynolds turned quickly to Helen, who was standing pale and silent by the fire.

"Do you wish me to go? Will you trust me enough to let me stay? You have only to say one word and I will go at once, but let me stay. You can trust me."

Helen raised her eyes to his with a sudden imploring look.

"Do you notice how changed he is?" she said in a low voice, speaking out the trouble that had lain so heavily upon her.

"He is overtaxed, overstrained. It will be all right when this is done with. I am sure of it."

"It will never be finished." Her voice had passionate despair in it. "Oh, don't you see?"

"I am going to help him," was the quick answer. "Nay, you must not refuse me. I did him wrong; he has given me the chance to undo that wrong. You have no right to step between us."

"There, that's the book," exclaimed Mr. Tristram, coming back with a great folio volume in his arms. "My books must really be arranged more carefully, Helen. I shall want them constantly now. Mr. Reynolds is going to look over the alterations I have made in the manuscript, and I shall want to show him my authorities."

Insensibly the burden, that had been growing too heavy for Helen, slipped from her, and the dark days grew bright with new hope.

The book was making wonderful progress now. Everything seemed to go right under the guidance of Mr. Reynolds. Mr. Tristram grew more like his old self as he learnt to rely on his fellow-worker's help, and recognised what valuable help it was.

One day Helen met Mr. Reynolds coming up the stairs, two or three stairs at a time, with a pile of books under his arm. She had had no chance of speaking to him alone for days and days, and she stopped now, determined to say out what was burning in her heart.

"What right have we to take your time like this?" she said, her voice vibrating with strong feeling. He stopped, and looked up at her as she stood a step or two above him.

"No right? Oh, Helen!" Before she could answer he went on quickly: "Don't mistake me. I am asking for nothing. I am not as bad as that. But you won't deny me this happiness."

"But your own work? You give yourself up to this."

He smiled at her. "This will soon be done. And I am proud to have a part in it. It is a great book—a wonderful book. More and more I see its merits."

"Are you sure?" said Helen faintly. "I had lost all faith in it. Is it really good?"

"Indeed it is," he answered earnestly. "It was a shame to me to have been so blind at first."

"Oh, don't speak of that," she answered quickly. "Can we ever forget what we owe you?"

"Do you know my name is to appear at large in the preface?" His tone was light, but his eyes had a depth of feeling in them. "Your grandfather insists on a public acknowledgment of my help. I think yours ought to be there, too."

"I did so much, didn't I?" she answered, with a little smile. "And now I am doing nothing."

The days went on. Christmas came and went. The New Year came and brought blue sky and sunshine.

"I never thought the sun could shine like this in London," said Helen to her grandfather, as she stood looking out of the high window at the sky above the roofs. It all looked so bright and cheerful to-day. There were sparrows twittering close at hand; there was a woman selling flowers in the street below: great masses of anemones, white and red. Helen looked down at the flowers with a quick desire for some. But it was a long way down the stairs, and they had no money to spare for flowers. It seemed to her that he must have divined that wish when, turning round at the opening of the door, she saw John Reynolds come in with a big bunch of the anemones in his hand.

"I couldn't resist them," he said, putting them carelessly on the table. "I don't think I can work to-day, Mr. Tristram. I want you both to come out with me."

Mr. Tristram looked wistfully at the table, but he could not resist the gleam of delight on Helen's face, and they soon started.

"I am going to take you into Regent's Park," Mr. Reynolds said. "You abuse poor London so, Miss Mainwaring, that I want to show you something more like country than you dream of."

They walked on, saying little till they reached the park. It was a wonderful day; with a balmy air and a sun shining brightly in a cloudless sky. Mr. Tristram sat down on one of the benches in the walk they entered, and Helen and Mr. Reynolds strolled on.

"This is a new London to me," she said, looking round her with delight. "But oh, how it makes me long for the real, *real* country. It is almost worse than the fogs for that."

"Do you mean to say you want your moors instead of this?"

"Ah, you don't know what they are," Helen answered with a long breath.

Both thought, with a sudden rush of feeling, of that day he had spent among the moors. Neither spoke for a moment. Then he said:

"You know the book is finished except a page or two. I saw those publishers again last night." He mentioned the name of a famous

firm. "I feel sure they will take it at their own risk, but I do not wish your grandfather to know till it is quite settled."

"You are very kind," she said in a low voice. "He is much better, don't you think so?"

"Oh, much—much better." He stopped. There were some railings dividing the path from the sweep of grass, and he rested his arm on them, not looking at Helen, but down on the ground.

"My work here is nearly over now," he said.

"Ah, how shall we thank you?" answered Helen.

"Do you know what I am wishing?" he said in a quick, agitated voice. All his lightness of manner had gone. Helen saw now how pale and worn and unhappy he looked.

"What do you wish?" she said gently.

"That I had never done anything for you. That there had been no need for help from me."

Helen could not speak. She felt too profoundly hurt. He saw the look in her face and went hurriedly on.

"Ah, don't you see? I don't want your gratitude. It is hateful to me. Do you think I claim anything from you as a reward of my service? I claim nothing. You are absolutely free."

"I must be grateful."

"Not if you had loved me. It would have been your right——"

Helen gave him one look and hurriedly moved away. He walked on by her side a few steps, and then broke the silence.

"I ought not to have said that. Forgive me; I would do anything in the world rather than give you pain." He stopped a moment and then went on. "I did it to try to win you back. I came to London for that. But I gave up hope weeks ago. Whatever I have done since then has been done for no selfish reason. Do me the justice to believe that."

"Oh, I do believe it."

"I was a fool once, you know," he said, with a self-scornful laugh. "A confident fool. I know my own value better now."

They had come in sight of the bench, where her grandfather sat sunning himself in mild content. Some children were standing on the bank of the water feeding the ducks, with an accompaniment of merry shouts and cries. No one else was in sight. Helen stopped and looked hesitatingly at her companion.

"Well?" he said, with an effort at a smile.

"Are you sure?" Helen began. She stopped; her face lighted up with a glow of softest, tenderest rose-colour.

"Sure?" he echoed.

"Sure that you are so very wise now?"

"Helen!"

But she had walked quickly on to her grandfather's side. They could say no more to each other. But what more was there need to say just then? "To hear with eyes belongs to Love's rare wit."

## TOO SOON AND TOO LATE.

ONE morning towards the latter end of July, 1874, the early train from Pepinster to Spa brought with it the usual motley collection of citizens from Liége out for a holiday: old women with brown paper parcels and peasants in blouses, mostly picked up at Theux and the other intervening stations; and two first-class passengers.

The solitary vehicle outside the station having been speedily chartered by the latter, they found themselves, after some ten minutes' jolting on the primitively uneven pavement of the Rue Royale and the adjoining hill, safely deposited together with their luggage in the courtyard of the Hôtel de Flandre. While they are engaged in refreshing the outer and inner man by means of bath and breakfast, thereby dispelling the fatigue of a night's journey from Paris, not to mention a compulsory halt at Liége from 5 to 7 a.m., we avail ourselves of their temporary seclusion to introduce them to our readers.

Gaston de Rieux, the elder of the two, was a fair average specimen of that peculiar class of Frenchmen apparently indigenous to the Boulevard, and who never seem thoroughly at home anywhere else. He was rather above the middle height, slightly formed, with dark eyes and hair, well-trimmed moustache and regular but inanimate features, seldom betraying any expression save that of listless indifference and self-satisfied languor.

A few months' campaigning as a volunteer in 1870 had been the only break in his hitherto colourless existence, habitually confined within the limits of the Bois, the little theatres, and the "petit cercle" of the Rue Royale.

His devotion to this last-named establishment, especially to its board of green cloth, had gradually absorbed not merely his own modest patrimony but three-fourths of an inheritance to which he had opportunely succeeded on the death of a bachelor uncle; and at the time of his arrival at Spa, Monsieur—or, to give him his full title—Count Gaston de Rieux, beheld his available assets reduced to something like fifty thousand francs in specie, not including the very problematical chance of an ultimate legacy from an exceedingly devout aunt, who had openly declared her intention of bequeathing the greater portion of her property to charitable uses.

However, it is a long lane that has no turning, and the turning-point in his case appeared to him after mature consideration to be matrimony; not that he had any decided vocation for the holy state, but between two evils—a wife or utter impecuniosity—he thought himself justified in choosing the least disagreeable.

As to any difficulty in carrying his project into execution, such a possible contingency never even entered his mind. It was sufficient for him that he, the representative of an ancient family, still in the prime of life (he was only forty-two, though he looked forty-eight), and an acknowledged leader of "la haute gomme," was prepared to throw the handkerchief; and, for reasons of his own which will be hereafter explained, Spa was the place selected by him for the performance of that ceremony.

His companion, by name Ernest Maréchal, had little in common with the personage just described. He was neither well-born nor well-looking, being the son of a notary at Dijon, and of so unwieldy a bulk as to have been styled by one of the houris of the Folies Dramatiques—a theatre largely patronised by him—"gros patapouf."

After a year or two's irregular attendance at the Ecole de Droit, and a narrow escape from being plucked for his Baccalauréat, he had been appointed, shortly before the fall of the empire, Auditeur du Conseil d'Etat. But since 1870, his father's death having put him into possession of a snug fortune arising from the sale of the *charge*, he had exchanged the servitude of official duties for the easier life of a man about town.

Owing to the influence of de Rieux, likewise a native of Dijon, and whose family had long ranked among the best clients of the étude Maréchal, he had been admitted, though not without protest, into the "petit cercle" and other exclusive réunions; and, in spite of his plebeian origin and physical disadvantages, contrived to pass muster among the outsiders of the Parisian beau monde. His one ambition was to secure a permanent footing in society by marriage; not, as in the case of his friend, for the purpose of gilding his coronet—for he had none to gild—but in order to obtain, at least by right of his wife, that recognised social position which had as yet been denied him.

He, too, had a motive in coming to Spa; and we may as well hear it from his own lips, while he and his associate are respectively enjoying their cigars in the garden of the Hôtel de Flandre.

"You don't seem to be getting on, Ernest," lazily remarked M. de Rieux to the ex-auditeur, who had been poring for the last ten minutes over the file of the *Saison de Spa*.

"I only wish you had to wade through these crack-jaw names," replied the other, testily: "Schnapper from Antwerp, Schnipper from Verviers, Van Galgenbrock from Rotterdam! Stay!" he added, brightening up, and pointing triumphantly with his finger to a paragraph in the journal. "Here is something that concerns you, at all events. Monsieur et Mademoiselle Lexington Taddy, New York, Hôtel de Portugal."

"Where's the Hôtel de Portugal?" inquired Gaston, languidly.

"How should I know? Ask the waiter. Don't interrupt me; my turn ought to be coming soon. Let me see, where was I?

Smith, Knoblauch, Dubois, Signora Cavatina, Podgers . . . Ah, at last! Madame Fitzmaurice, Angleterre, Rue Louise. Where's the Rue Louise?"

"Can't say," yawned his friend; "never was here before. Ask the waiter."

One of the functionaries in question happening to be within hail at that moment, Maréchal, generally the spokesman on such occasions, extracted from him, amid a multitude of savez-vous, the information that both the Hôtel de Portugal and the Rue Louise were in the immediate vicinity of the baths, overlooking the Place Royale. Having delivered himself of this topographic detail, and receiving an affirmative reply to the never-failing inquiry, "Ces messieurs dinent à la table d'hôte?" the waiter, after a valedictory flourish of his napkin, retired to the bureau, and forthwith booked the new arrivals for the five o'clock repast, as follows: "Trente-deux et trente-trois, deux couverts."

"Suppose we take a turn that way," said M. de Rieux, rising from his chair and lighting another cigar. "Does la belle Anglaise expect to see you here?"

"Hardly," answered Ernest. "You forget I was only introduced to her at Madame de Marbois's ball. But I heard that *she* was coming, and so ——"

"You naturally discovered that the Spa waters were indispensable for both of us. Is she then such a miracle of beauty?"

"She is *very* handsome," returned the other gravely. "But that is not the principal point with me. She is intimate with half the Faubourg St. Germain."

"I understand," said Gaston, with a smile. "Has her husband been dead long?"

"Long enough to be forgotten, I should say, if one may judge from appearances; but I neither know nor care. All I can tell you is that she has been staying, since Easter, in the Rue St. Dominique, with her little girl, and a Dame de compagnie, and that I consider her sufficiently posée in society to become Madame Maréchal whenever she chooses."

"I wish I could make up my mind as easily," remarked his companion; "though I suppose I shall have to do it at last. The American Meess is good-looking enough, and dresses well; but her French is so atrocious that I shudder every time she opens her mouth. As for the beau-père, he is fearful to contemplate; but eight hundred thousand francs would gild a worse pill than that. Besides, in case of necessity, I can always make him wear a white waistcoat and pumps; and as of course I shall never introduce him to anyone, nine people out of ten will take him for a respectable butler or head waiter; rather a compliment to him than otherwise, by the way. So prepare, mon bon, to see in me a second 'Gendre de M. Poirier;' with this difference, that in my revised and cor-

rected edition, the 'gendre' will be everything, and M. Poirier—nothing."

An hour or two after the conversation above related, the Allée de Sept Heures presented an unusually brilliant and festive aspect; crowds of gaily-dressed children, under the escort of smartly-capped bonnes, were anxiously hurrying towards the kiosk at the end of the avenue, in front of which a temporary flooring had been laid down. The musicians were already at their post, and two masters of the ceremonies, in full evening costume, were busily engaged in providing each new-comer with a suitable partner for the opening dance. Seated in rows of chairs placed round the improvised ball-room were the mothers and sisters of the happy juveniles, together with most of the leading visitors; the Thursday bal d'enfans (one of the prettiest sights of Spa) being a highly popular feature in the weekly programme.

At some distance from the rest of the spectators, and occupied in giving the finishing touch to the toilette of a charming little muslin-frocked fairy, were two ladies, one elderly, the other about six or seven-and-twenty, and strikingly handsome; and near them, in all the glory of pearl-grey gloves and irreproachable bottines, stood our old acquaintance, Ernest Maréchal. He had evidently just arrived, and was addressing some remark to the younger lady, when the first notes of a polka from the orchestra attracted the child's attention, and she began forthwith to caper about like a miniature St. Vitus.

"May I go, mamma?" she pleaded.

"Yes, love," said her mother; "go and ask that young gentleman in the sailor's dress if he will dance with you. Miss Withers, will you kindly see that she does not overheat herself? Thanks. Eh bien, Monsieur Maréchal," she continued, turning to Ernest, "what lucky wind has brought you to Spa?"

"The luck is mine, madame," replied the gallant Frenchman, "since I have the good fortune to find *you* here."

"Not for long," said Mrs. Fitzmaurice; "another week will see me on my road to England."

"So soon," murmured M. Maréchal sympathetically; then thought to himself: "I have a week before me, at all events."

"I shall be sorry to leave Spa," she went on; "the quiet, easy life one leads here suits me to perfection. And yet, with the exception of Alice Taddy and yourself, I hardly know a soul in the place. Do look, Monsieur Maréchal, how gracefully my little Blanche dances; is she not a sweet child?"

"She is the image of her mother," answered Ernest, with a look that spoke volumes.

At this moment their tête-à-tête was interrupted by the arrival of a tall and remarkably pretty girl, a walking advertisement of the last cocodette novelty imagined by the ingenious M. Worth, who greeted Mrs. Fitzmaurice with the most "gushing" display of affection, and

as M. Maréchal politely made way for her, acknowledged his attention by a familiar nod and a "Bon jour, monsieur," her pronunciation of which three words would have driven Messrs. Noël and Chapsal into fits.

"My darling Eva, I am *so* late, but it is not my fault; we have had a visit; only think—Count Gaston de Rieux! What a surprise, isn't it? He is coming up the alley with papa, and is going to stay here ever so long. Isn't that nice?"

"Very nice for Monsieur de Rieux's friends, no doubt," said Mrs. Fitzmaurice; "but you forget, Alice, that I am not acquainted with him."

"Oh, if that's all, I'll introduce you; and no time like the present, for here they are."

As she spoke, a bald-headed, jovial-looking old gentleman with a very red face joined the group, followed by M. de Rieux and a middle-aged personage in a black alpaca coat, cut in a fashion strongly savouring of "la Belle Jardinière," of whom nobody seemed to take any particular notice.

After the introduction had been effected, the conversation became general, and Mr. Lexington Taddy, in a loud and dictatorial tone and execrable French, proceeded to pass the company in review, ever and anon addressing a word or two confidentially to the man in the alpaca coat sitting beside him, whom he euphoniously designated as "John Durong." Gaston, as in duty bound, occupied the chair adjoining that of the American heiress, while his friend whispered soft nothings in the ear of the fair Englishwoman, who, however, intent on watching the gambols of Mademoiselle Blanche, proved but an indifferent listener to her complimentary neighbour.

At length, the final crash of a galop announced the termination of the ball, and shortly after, with a mutual promise on the part of the ladies to meet again at the evening concert on the Place Royale, the party separated: Mrs. Fitzmaurice returning with her little daughter to the Rue Louise, and Miss Alice, escorted by the four gentlemen, sallying forth to exhibit her airs and graces for the benefit of the four-o'clock water-drinkers at the Pouhon.

The table d'hôte at the Flandre passed off as such miscellaneous gatherings usually do: M. de Rieux and his friend, as new arrivals, being consigned to the second table, and there wedged in between a fat Belgian notary on one side and a spectacled Englishwoman of mature age, wholly innocent of any language but her own, on the other; while immediately opposite sat a young German couple on their honeymoon tour from Coblentz, gifted with inordinate appetites, and performing such intricate feats with their knives as would have astounded Ramo Samee himself.

"Tout ceci n'est pas folichon," observed Gaston to his companion, as they finally rose from their seats and retired to enjoy their coffee and cigars in the garden; "better have gone to Trouville"

"Business before pleasure," sententiously replied Ernest; "you forget we have work on hand."

"True," sighed the other, "and terribly hard work it is. A pic-nic to-morrow at a place they call the Géronstère, and excursions without end for the remainder of the week. If I could only find the girl alone, there might be a chance of seeing how the land lies; but there is no escaping the beau père and that inevitable Jean Durand!"

"Who *is* Jean Durand?" inquired Maréchal.

"Ah, that is precisely what I want to know. He must be either an agent or a broker, or something of the kind, and a sharp fellow into the bargain, for the old man, who is no fool, never gives an order at the Bourse without first consulting him. I have tried once or twice to make him talk, but he is as close as wax, and, like the mason in 'Les Mémoires du Diable,' seldom goes beyond 'Yes' or 'No.' One thing is certain: he dines every other day at the Hôtel Taddy, so I suppose when I marry meess and her eight hundred thousand francs, I shall have to take Monsieur Jean Durand as one of the fixtures. But enough of him," continued M. de Rieux, "tell me about *your* little affair with the charming widow, for charming she is, ma parole! By the way, where did she pick up her Parisian accent?"

"Naturally enough," answered Ernest. "She is half a Frenchwoman. Her mother was Mdlle. de Ligneraie, and she herself was educated aux oiseaux. She leaves for England next week, so I have no time to lose."

"That's all in your favour, let me tell you," said Gaston. "If there is one thing a woman likes more than another, it is a short courtship, and a man who comes to the point at once is a rarity, as times go. So bonne chance, and let us start for the Place Royale, or our own sweet voices will be the only music we are likely to hear this evening."

During the four or five ensuing days, the excursion programme determined upon by the inventive Miss Alice was rigidly adhered to: the pic-nic announced to take place beneath the fine old trees of the Géronstère spring had been unanimously voted a great success, nor had the woods of the Sauvenière and the adjoining promenade Condé been forgotten. Light pony carriages, drawn by the hardy bidets of the Ardennes, had been put in requisition for the remoter cascade of Coo and the picturesque Franchimont, and the popping of champagne corks had joyously resounded in the shady arbours of the Barisart. The little shooting-gallery in the Allée de Sept Heures had afforded M. de Rieux frequent opportunities of displaying his unerring aim, and the Saturday ball at the Casino had witnessed the triumphant début of a delicious combination of tulle, lace and other ethereal fabrics, dispatched from the Rue de la Paix for the especial glorification of the bewitching Yankee.

The important question, however, had yet to be risked.

M. Maréchal, biding his time, had hitherto contented himself with playing a waiting game and gallantly anticipating every wish and caprice of his inamorata; Gaston, on the contrary, embarrassed by the constant presence of the lynx-eyed Taddy and his alter ego, Jean Durand, had barely ventured on an occasional tender sigh or effusive whisper, backed by all the eloquent admiration his well-practised glances could convey.

But the moment for more decisive action had arrived. Mrs. Fitzmaurice's approaching departure rendered "strong running" on the part of Ernest indispensable; while an uninterrupted series of ill-luck at the écarté table of the Casino had reduced his companion's finances to so low an ebb that the immediate solution of his doubts became no longer a matter of choice, but of absolute necessity.

It was therefore settled between them that they should simultaneously open the attack, and to this end M. de Rieux solicited an interview on the following morning with the father of his charmer; Maréchal on his side requesting the favour of a few moments' conversation at the same hour with the object of his petits soins, who for the last day or two had for some reason best known to herself been in better spirits and more delightfully animated than usual.

Shortly before the appointed time, the friends started on their expedition: Gaston, as is customary with his countrymen in such cases, arrayed in full evening dress, and M. Maréchal in as irresistible a summer costume as the resources of his wardrobe could supply.

At the corner of the Place Royale, M. de Rieux gave a final twirl to his moustache, and shook his fellow-sufferer cordially by the hand.

"Remember," he said, as he crossed the road leading to the Hôtel de Portugal, "rendezvous at the entrance of the Sept Heures after matters are settled; the first comer will wait for the other."

"Agreed," replied Ernest, and commenced with some little inward trepidation the ascent of the Rue Louise.

Half an hour had scarcely elapsed when the nursery-maids, installed with their respective charges on the benches of the Sept Heures Avenue, were startled by the sudden apparition of a white-cravated, primrose-gloved gentleman, pacing to and fro with ill-dissembled impatience, and twisting his carefully-waxed moustache with a nervous and disconsolate air. Ere they had well digested this unheard-of inroad on their privacy, the stranger was joined by a second intruder, of equally downcast aspect, with whom he retired to a secluded alley skirting the hill, and was lost to view.

"Eh bien?" inquired the Count, when they were alone.

M. Maréchal shrugged his shoulders significantly, but said nothing.

"Ah!" continued M. de Rieux, who appeared perfectly to comprehend the gesture, "just my own case to a T. Now for the details; shall I begin?"

Ernest nodded gloomily.

"Well, I sent in my name, walked into the salon, and found the old fellow smoking in an arm-chair, with his feet on the mantelpiece. When I had lit one of his cigars—first-rate Havannahs!—to keep him company, I started the subject at once; treated him to a genealogical sketch of the de Rieux family, touched on the Crusades, Godfrey de Bouillon, and that sort of thing, and then began a flaming panegyric of Meess Alice, her beauty, good sense (the poor creature hasn't two ideas in her head, but fathers never find *that* out), and not a word about her money. In short, I let him know that I was disposed to overlook any trifling difference of caste, and concluded by formally proposing myself as his future son-in-law. He heard me out very quietly, and when I had finished: 'Wal,' said he (he always says 'wal'), 'your offer is highly flattering both to my daughter and myself, and it's a pity that you didn't think of it sooner, for she has been engaged these three days, and the contract will be signed next week.'

"'Engaged!' I exclaimed, quite taken aback, as you may fancy. 'May I ask to whom?'

"'To my old friend, John Durong, correspondent of one of our leading houses, Bunker and Pillicoddy, of New York. What else should he be idling here for?'

"'Confound John Durong,' was my first thought, but there was no help for it, so, putting the best face I could on the matter, I begged him to present my congratulations to mademoiselle, muttered something about eternal regret and so forth, and walked downstairs just in time to receive a charming bow from the young lady herself, returning from her morning bath. So much for *my* matrimonial campaign. Encouraging, isn't it?"

"Not worse than mine," said Ernest; "you'll never guess what happened to me. When I was ushered into the sitting-room, I found myself tête-à-tête with a tall fellow, six foot high at least, and evidently a new arrival, for the passage was full of trunks and wrappers. He stared at me, and I at him; I, wondering what on earth he was doing there, and he, probably thinking the same of me. However, he was civil enough, offered me a chair, and went out saying Madame would be with me directly. Presently in she came, looking her very best; and after a word or two on indifferent subjects, sat down, and waited for me to begin. I didn't find it so easy as I had imagined, and felt most unaccountably nervous; but by degrees that wore off, and I was myself again. I needn't repeat what followed; you know that timidity is not my weak point, and that once en train I can plead my cause tolerably well. I did so; she listened attentively, I may say sympathetically. I grew more and more eloquent, protested that I could not live without her, and finally asked her point-blank to be my wife."

"And she respectfully declined the honour?" interrupted Gaston.

"Worse than that. She burst into a fit of laughter, and before I could add another syllable, disappeared into the next room, and came back with the tall man. 'Monsieur Maréchal,' said she, 'I must apologise for forgetting, thanks to your agreeable conversation, my duties as a hostess; allow me to introduce you to Colonel Fitzmaurice, my husband, who is only just returned from India, and who accompanies me to England to-morrow.'"

"What?" cried M. de Rieux. "She wasn't a widow after all?"

"No more than I am a Prussian, and you may fancy my situation. I was half afraid she was about to amuse herself at my expense, and tell him the whole story; but to do her justice, she kept her own counsel, and I slipped away as soon as I could, after promising to pay them a visit whenever I went to London. So if you have nothing that particularly detains you at Spa, there is a train at two, and ——"

"If we wish to catch it," said Gaston, looking at his watch, "we had better follow *your* example rather than *mine*."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. Better be *too soon* than *too late!*"

CHARLES HERVEY.

## POINTS OF VIEW.

### ELLE.

"BUT if it all is as you say—
If love can turn bleak March to May,
And if love lasts, as you pretend,
Where does pain come from, O my friend?
Whence come the grief-lined cheek and brow
I see about me, even now?
Ah! love's a mirage, is it not?
Soon seen, soon lost, and soon forgot!"

### LUI.

"But if love is a mirage, dear,
Why are we clever people here?
If love's soon over, as you say,
Whence comes the joy we taste to-day—
The same dear joy that makes a nest
In many a travel-weary breast?
Ah! love's the one oasis worth
Our journey through this desert earth!"

E. NESBIT.

M. L. GOW. R. TAYLOR

"LOST!" CRIED MIRPAH IN HIGH GLEF, WHEN THE SIXTH GUESS WAS PROCLAIMED.

THE ARGOSY.

*SEPTEMBER, 1891.*

# THE FATE OF THE HARA DIAMOND.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### THE THIRD REPORT CONTINUED.

'FIVE minutes later, Captain Ducie and your hopeful son slunk out of Bon Repos like the thieves we were, and treading the gravelled pathway as carefully as two Indians on the war-trail might have done, we came presently to the margin of the starlit lake. There was no lack of boats at Bon Repos, and soon I was pulling over the quiet mere in the direction of Bowness. We managed to find the little pier without much difficulty. There we disembarked, and then chained up the boat and left it. By this time the first faint streaks of day were brightening in the East. There would be no train from Bowness for three or four hours. Captain Ducie's impatience could not brook such a delay. At his request I roused the people at one of the hotels. Even then we had to stand kicking our heels for half an hour before a conveyance and pair of horses could be got ready for us. But when we were once fairly under way, no grass was suffered to grow under our horses' feet. The Captain's object was to catch one of the fast up trains at Oxenholme Junction, some fourteen miles away. This we succeeded in doing, with a quarter of an hour to spare. A portion of that quarter of an hour was occupied by me in sending a certain telegram to my respected *pater*. The day was still young when Captain Ducie and I alighted at Euston Square.

"I did not know whether it was the Captain's intention to give me my congé as soon as we should reach town, but I certainly knew that it was not my intention to part from him quite so readily. He had insisted on my travelling up in the same carriage with himself, and I had had the free run of his cognac and cigars. During the early part of the journey he had been silent and thoughtful, but by no means morose. As the morning advanced, however, his shoulder had begun to pain him greatly, and by the time we reached London

I could see, although he uttered no complaint, that the agony was almost more than he could bear. Consequently, I was not surprised as I helped him to alight from the railway carriage, to hear him say :

"'Jasmin, my good fellow, I find that it will not do for me to part from you just yet. This confounded shoulder of mine seems as if it were going to make a nuisance of itself. You must order a cab and go with me. I will make your excuses to M. Platzoff.'

"'Right you are, sir,' said I. 'Where shall I tell cabby to drive to?'

"'To the Salisbury Hotel, Fleet Street.'

"Captain Ducie was such an undoubted West-end swell that I was rather surprised to find him going east of Temple Bar. But my place was to obey, and not to question his behests.

"'Get into the cab: I want to talk to you,' said he. 'On one or two points it will be requisite that I should take you into my confidence,' he began, as soon as we were out of the station. 'And I have less hesitation in doing this because, from what I have seen of you, I believe you to be a perfectly trustworthy and straightforward fellow.'

"'It is very kind of you to say so, sir,' I answered respectfully.

"'Now, for certain reasons which I need not detail, I do not want my presence in London to be known to anyone. I am going to an hotel where I have never been before, and where I am entirely unknown. While stopping at this hotel I shall pass under the name of Mr. Stonor, a country gentleman—let us say—of limited means, who is up in town for the furtherance of some business of a legal character. Can you remember "Mr. Stonor, from the country?"'

"'I shall not forget it, sir; you may trust me for that.'

"'Yes, if I had not felt that I could trust you, I should not have brought you so far, nor have taken you so deeply into my confidence.'

"Father! for the first time these dozen years your son blushed.

"On reaching the hotel Mr. Stonor seemed to care little or nothing about the size or comfort of the rooms that were shown him. He was particular on one point only. That point was the fastening of his bedroom door.

"After rejecting three or four rooms in succession, he chose one that had a stouter lock than ordinary, and that could be reached only through another room. In this other room it was arranged that I should sleep, so that no one could obtain access to Mr. Stonor without first disturbing me.

"Is not this another proof that I acted judiciously in leaving Bon Repos, and that Captain Ducie, above all men in the world, is the man I ought to stick to?

"We had no sooner settled about the rooms than Captain Ducie

was obliged to go to bed. He would not allow me to help him off with any other article of dress than his outer coat. Then he sent me for a doctor, and when the doctor and I got back he was in bed. The doctor pronounced the wound in his shoulder to be not a dangerous one, but one that would necessitate much care and attention. The Captain was condemned to stay in bed for at least a week to come.

"There is no occasion to weary you with too many details. A week—ten days, passed away and I still remained in attendance on Captain Ducie. For the first four or five days he did not progress much towards recovery. He was too fidgety, too anxious in his mind, to get well. I knew the form which his anxiety had taken when I saw how impatient he was each morning till he had got the newspaper in his fingers, and could be left alone to wade through it. At the end of an hour or so he would ring his bell, and would tell me, with a weary look, to take 'that cursed newspaper' away.

"I was just as impatient for the newspaper as he was, and did not fail to submit its contents each morning to a most painstaking search.

"After the sixth day there was a decided improvement in the condition of Captain Ducie, and from that date he progressed rapidly towards recovery. It was on the sixth day that my search through the newspaper was rewarded by finding a paragraph that interested me almost as much as it must have interested Captain Ducie. The paragraph in question was in the shape of an extract from *The Westmoreland Gazette*, and ran as under:—

"'*The Dangers of Opium-smoking.*—We have to record the sudden death of M. Paul Platzoff, a Russian gentleman of fortune, who has resided for several years on the banks of Windermere. M. Platzoff was found dead in bed on the morning of Wednesday last. From the evidence given at the inquest it would appear that the unfortunate gentleman had been accustomed for years to a frequent indulgence in the pernicious habit of opium-smoking, and the medical testimony went to prove that he must have died while in one of those trances which make up the opium-smoker's elysium. At the same time, it is but just to observe that had not the post-mortem examination revealed the fact of there having been heart disease of long standing, the mere fact of the deceased gentleman having been addicted to opium-smoking would not of itself have been sufficient to account for his sudden death.'

"There are one or two facts to be noted in connection with the foregoing account. In the first place, it is there stated that M. Platzoff was found dead in bed. When I saw him soon after midnight, he lay dead on the divan in the smoke-room. But it is possible, that the use of the word 'bed' in the newspaper account may be a mere verbal inaccuracy. In the second place, there is not a word

said respecting Cleon. Now, had the valet disappeared precisely at the time of M. Platzoff's mysterious death, suspicion of some sort would have been sure to attach to him, and an inquiry would have been set on foot respecting his whereabouts. Such being the case, the natural conclusions to be derived from the facts as known to us would seem to be: First, that Cleon was not out of the way when the body was found, and that the statements made at the inquest as to the habits of the deceased were made by him, and by him alone. Secondly, if any fracas took place between Cleon and Captain Ducie on that fatal night, as there is every reason to suspect, the mulatto has not seen fit to make any public mention of it. Captain Ducie's name, in fact, does not seem to have been once mentioned in connection with the affair, and if Cleon either knows or suspects that the Captain has the Great Diamond in his possession, he has doubtless had good reasons of his own for keeping the knowledge to himself. That some curious underhand game has been played between him and the Captain there cannot, I think, be any reasonable doubt.

"As soon as I had read the paragraph above quoted, I took the newspaper up to Captain Ducie, and pointed out the lines to him as if I had accidentally come across them. I wanted to hear what he would have to say about the death of Platzoff.

"'Some strange news here, sir, about M. Platzoff,' I said. 'Here is an account of ——'

"He interrupted me with a wave of his hand. 'I have seen it, Jasmin, I have seen it, and terribly shocked I was to have such news of my friend. So strangely sudden, too! I always suspected that he would do himself an injury with that beastly drug which he would persist in smoking, but I never dreamed of anything so terrible as this. I suppose it will be requisite for you to go down to Bon Repos for a time, Jasmin. There will be your wages, and your luggage and things to look after. What articles of mine were left behind I make you a present of. I hope to be sufficiently recovered in the course of three or four days to be able to spare you, and I will, of course, pay your fare back to Westmoreland, and remunerate you for the time you have been in my service. For myself, I intend spending the next few months somewhere on the Continent.'

"I replied that I was in no hurry to go down to Bon Repos; that, indeed, there was no particular necessity for me to go at all; that the amount due to me for wages was very trifling, and that my clothes and other things would no doubt be forwarded by Cleon to any address I might choose to send him.

"But the Captain would not hear of this. I must go down to Bon Repos and look after my interests on the spot, he said; and he would arrange to spare me in a few days. His motive for taking such a special interest in my affairs was not difficult to discover. He wanted thoroughly to break the link between himself and me. By sending me down to Bon Repos he would secure two or three clear

days in which to complete whatever arrangements he might think necessary, and would, besides, insure himself from being watched or spied upon by me. Not that he doubted my fidelity in the least, but it seemed to me that of late he had grown suspicious of everybody; and, in any case, he was desirous of severing even the faintest tie that connected him in any way with M. Platzoff and Bon Repos. Such, at least, was the conclusion at which I arrived in my own mind. But it may have been an erroneous one.

"Although Captain Ducie was desirous of getting rid of me, I did not mean to lose sight of him quite so readily. Each day that passed over my head confirmed me more fully in my belief that he had the Great Hara Diamond concealed somewhere about his person. I had no one strong positive bit of evidence on which to base such a belief. It was rather by the aggregation of a hundred minute points all tending one way that I was enabled to build up my suspicions into a certainty.

"If he had made himself master of the Diamond, he had done so illegally. He had stolen the gem, and I should have felt no more compunction in dispossessing him of it than I should have felt in picking a sovereign out of the gutter. But the prospect of making the gem my own seemed even more remote now, if that were possible, than when I was at Bon Repos. Nothing went further towards confirming my belief that the Captain had the Diamond by him than the fact of his taking so many and such unusual precautions to insure himself against a surprise from anyone, either by day or night. As already stated, I slept in the room that opened immediately out of his, so that no one could reach him except by passing through my room. Then, he always slept with the door of his bedroom double locked, and with his face turned to the window, the blind pertaining to which was drawn to the top, leaving the view clear and unobstructed. In addition, Captain Ducie always kept a loaded revolver under his pillow, and I had heard too much of his skill with that weapon to doubt that he would make an efficient use of it should such a need ever arise. What chance, then, did there seem for ce pauvre Jacques ever being able to coax the Diamond out of the hands of this man, who had no more right to it than had the Grand Turk? Still, I put a good face on the matter, and would not allow myself to despair.

"After the sixth day Captain Ducie improved rapidly. On the tenth day he said to me: 'This is the last day that I shall require your services. You had better arrange to start by the nine forty-five train to-morrow morning for Windermere.'

"The Captain was not the sort of man to whom one could say that one did not want to go to Windermere, that one had no intention of going there. The slightest opposition from an inferior in position only confirmed him the more obstinately in his own views. All, therefore, that I said was: 'I am entirely at your service, sir, to

go or stay as may suit you best.' All the same, I had no intention of going.

"What I intended was to bid farewell to Captain Ducie, take a cab to the station, go quietly in at one gate and out at another. But the Captain spoiled this little plan next morning by announcing his intention of going with me to the station. He was evidently anxious to see with his own eyes that I really left London, and this of course only made me more determined not to go. I had only a few minutes in which to make my arrangements. It was necessary that I should take someone at least partially into my confidence, and I could think of no one who would suit my purpose better than Dickson, the one-eyed night-porter at the hotel. He was fast asleep in bed at that hour of the morning, but I went up to his room and roused him. He was a quick-witted fellow enough where anything crooked was concerned, while in the simple straightforward matters of daily life he was often unaccountably stupid. His one eye gleamed brightly when I put half a sovereign into his hand, and told him what I wanted him to do for me. I left him fully satisfied that he would do it.

"A cab was ordered, my modest portmanteau was tossed on to the roof, Captain Ducie was shut up inside, and with myself on the box beside the driver, away we rattled to Euston Square. The Captain went himself and took a ticket for me to Windermere. He had already given me a handsome douceur in return for my services from the date of our leaving Bon Repos. He now saw me safely into the carriage, gave me my ticket, and nodded a kindly farewell. He did not move from his post on the platform till he saw the train fairly under way. So parted Captain Ducie and your unworthy son.

"At Wolverton, which was the first station at which the train stopped, I got out and gave up my ticket, with a pretence to the railway people that I had unfortunately left some important papers in town and that I must go back by the first train. Back I went accordingly, and reached Euston station in less than five hours after I had left it.

"My first object was to thoroughly disguise myself: no very difficult task to a person of my profession. My first visit was to the peruquier of the Royal Tabard. Here I was dispossessed of the charming little imperial which I had been cultivating for the last month or two, and from which I did not part without a pang of regret. Next I had my hair cut very close, and was fitted with a jet-black wig that could be termed nothing less than a triumph of mind over matter. When my eyebrows had been dyed to match, and when I had purchased and put on a pair of cheap spectacles, and had arrayed myself in a suit of ultra-respectable black, I felt that I could defy the keen eyes of Captain Ducie with impunity. Having exchanged my portmanteau for one of different size and colour, I took a cab, and drove boldly to the Salisbury Hotel. It was satisfactory to find that

Dickson passed me without recognising me, and I shall never forget the puzzled look that came into the fellow's face when I took him on one side and asked him for news of the Captain.

"The Captain had ordered his bill, Dickson told me when he had sufficiently recovered from his surprise, and had himself packed his own luggage, but without addressing it. A cab was to be in readiness for him at half-past eight that evening. I ordered a second cab to be in waiting for me at the corner of the street at the same hour. Meanwhile I kept carefully out of the Captain's way.

"At 8.35 p.m. my cab was following that of the Captain down the Strand, and in a little while we both drew up at the Waterloo terminus. Ducie's luggage consisted of one large portmanteau only, which the cabman handed over to one of the porters.

"'Where shall I label your luggage for, sir?' asked the man. It was too large to be taken into the carriage.

"The Captain hesitated for a moment, while the man waited with his paste-can in hand.

"'For Jersey,' he said at last.

"'Right you are, sir,' said the man. 'Bill, a Jersey label.'

"'I went at once and secured a ticket for that charming little spot.

"I did not lose sight of the Captain till I saw him fairly seated in his carriage and locked up by the guard. I travelled down in the next compartment but one.

"I need not detain you with any account of our journey by rail nor of our after-voyage from Southampton to St. Helier.

"The fact of my dating this communication from a Jersey hotel is a sufficient proof of my safe arrival. We reached here yesterday afternoon, the Captain never suspecting for a moment that he had James Jasmin, his ex-valet, for a fellow-passenger. We are lodged at different hotels, but the one at which I am staying is so nearly opposite that of the Captain, and has so excellent a view into the private sitting-room where he has taken up his quarters, that I see almost as much of him, both indoors and out, as I did during the time I acted as his valet. His reasons for coming here are best known to himself; but be they what they may, I do not feel inclined to alter my opinion one jot that he has brought the G. H. D. to this place with him.

"Whether, after all this time and trouble, I am any nearer the object for the attainment of which you first engaged me remains for you to judge. In any case send me instructions; tell me what I am to do or attempt next. Or do what would be infinitely better—come here in person, and talk over the affair with

"Your affectionate son,

"James Madgin."

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### GEORGE STRICKLAND'S QUEST.

THE strange story told by Sister Agnes in her confession, when, combined with her hinted suspicion that the account of Mr. Fairfax's death had no foundation in fact, opened up a series of questions which, under any circumstances, Janet would have felt herself incompetent to deal with alone. Major Strickland was the person of all others to whom she would have gone for counsel and assistance, even had no injunction been laid on her to that effect. That with him should be associated Father Spiridion could only be another source of gratulation to Janet. She had learned to love and reverence the kindly old man before, but now that she knew him to have been her mother's constant friend and adviser through many years of trouble, he seemed to have a thousand more claims on her affection. Into his hands and those of Major Strickland she committed her cause without reservation, feeling and knowing that they would do the same by her as if she were a child of their own.

It was in her relations towards Lady Chillington that Janet felt most the burden of the secret that had been laid upon her. To know that she was the granddaughter of that imperious old woman, and yet to be supposed not to be aware of the fact; to be able to walk down the long, dim picture gallery at Deepley Walls and say, with a proud swelling of the heart, "These were my ancestors;" to look up from the garden at the grey old pile, and then run across the wide-stretching park, and hear the unbidden whisper at her heart, "This is my rightful home"—in all this there was for Janet a strange sort of fascination which she could not overcome. But even had she not been bound by her promise to Sister Agnes not to reveal to Lady Chillington what had been told her, there was a sufficiency of stubborn pride in her composition to keep her from ever acquainting the mistress of Deepley Walls with her knowledge of a fact which that lady had persistently ignored for so many years. As simple Janet Hope she would go on till the end of the chapter, unless Lady Chillington should herself break the seal of silence and acknowledge her as the daughter of the woman she had so cruelly wronged.

One of Major Strickland's first acts in his capacity of adviser to Miss Hope was to ask permission to make a confidant of his nephew, Captain George, in all that related to his young ward's affairs. The request was granted as a matter of course. Had it been made in behalf of any other than George Strickland, it would have been at once acceded to; but with how much greater pleasure in his case, Janet herself could alone have told. Between Janet and Captain Strickland there had not been the remotest attempt at love-making in the common acceptation of the phrase; and yet, by one of love's

subtile intuitions, each read the other's heart, and knew of the sweet secret that lay hidden there. Any intentions that Captain George might have formed in his own mind as to the propriety, or necessity, of making mention of his love to her whom it most concerned were put aside for the time being in consequence of the death of Sister Agnes. He only laid them aside for a little while, because, as far as he then knew, there was no relationship between Sister Agnes and Janet. But when he came to learn from his uncle, as he was not long in doing, that Miss Hope was the daughter of Sister Agnes, and the granddaughter of Lady Chillington, he was obliged to thrust his intentions very far in the background, and it seemed doubtful to him whether they would not have to remain there for ever. The granddaughter of Lady Chillington was a very different person from Miss Janet Hope, with no prospects to speak of, and not a penny, beyond her quarter's salary, to call her own. To have wedded the Miss Hope he had supposed Janet to be would have made the happiness of his life; but to propose to Miss Hope as he now knew her was a very different affair. Captain Strickland was a poor man, but his pride was equal to his poverty; and to marry Lady Chillington's granddaughter without Lady Chillington's consent was more than that pride would allow him to do. Happily, the future might reveal to him some plan, by means of which his love and his pride might be reconciled, and walk together hand in hand. Till that time should come, if come it ever did, his love should remain hidden and dumb.

It was not till nearly a fortnight after the reading of Sister Agnes's Confession that any decision was arrived at by Major Strickland and Father Spiridion as to what steps, if any, should be taken with the view of unravelling the mystery in which the antecedents and fate of Mr. Fairfax were involved. The old soldier and the older priest, with Captain George to strengthen their consultations, met again and again, and discussed the question, as far as the data they had to go upon would allow of it, from every possible point of view. They all felt that underneath the veil which they longed and yet were half afraid to lift, might be hidden some disgraceful story, some dark mystery, which it were better that neither they nor anyone should become acquainted with. For Janet never to know who her father really was, and to remain in doubt as to whether he were alive or dead, might be painful to her feelings as a daughter, but for her to learn the truth might be more painful still. From Janet no positive expression of opinion could be elicited. She would be guided, she said, entirely by the wishes of those to whom the affair had been submitted. If they decided that no action whatever had better be taken in the matter, she was quite content to let it rest where it did. If, on the other hand, an investigation were decided upon, she would not shrink from an exposition of the truth, however painful it might be.

At length a definite course of action was resolved upon by the three gentlemen, and Major Strickland wrote to Janet by post :—

"Meet me at the King's Oak to-morrow afternoon at three. Bring with you the certificate and the miniature."

Janet was there at the time appointed, and there she found the Major and Captain George.

"I have asked you to meet me here," said the Major after the usual greetings were over, "to inform you that Father Spiridion and myself have decided that, with your permission, an investigation ought to be made into the circumstances connected with your mother's marriage and the supposed death of your father. We think that it would be in accordance with your mother's secret wishes that such an investigation should be entered upon after her death, and we think that, in justice to yourself, the mystery, if mystery there be, should be cleared up and set at rest for ever."

"You have my full and entire sanction to whatever plan of proceeding you may think most advisable," said Janet.

"In that case," said the Major, "George here shall start for Cumberland to-morrow morning, for it is there that our investigation must begin. Father Spiridion and I are both old men. George is young, active and energetic, and imbued with a thorough zeal for the furtherance of your interests. Have you sufficient confidence in him to entrust your cause into his hands?"

"My cause could not be in safer keeping," said Janet, with a blush and a smile. "I already owe my life to Captain Strickland. To that obligation he is now about to add another. How shall I ever be able to repay him, and you, and dear Father Spiridion, the thousand kindnesses I have received at your hands? Indeed, and indeed, I never can repay you!"

Janet's eyes as she ceased speaking went up shyly to those of Captain George. In the deep, earnest gaze of the young soldier she read something that caused her to tremble and blush for the second time—something that seemed to say, "There is one way, and one only, by which you can repay me."

"Tut! tut! poverina mia," said the Major, with a flourish of his malacca, "we are all three your bounden slaves, and never so happy as when we are fulfilling your behests. We will go back a part of the way with you, only we must not let her ladyship's lynx eyes see us together, or she will suspect we are hatching some conspiracy. Last time you were at my house I had some difficulty in gaining her permission to allow you to come."

Captain George offered Janet his arm. The Major walked beside them, flourishing his cane and talking on a score of different topics. So they went slowly through the sunlit park, back towards gray old Deepley Walls. George and Janet were mostly silent. What little they did say was nearly all addressed to the Major; they scarcely

spoke a word directly to each other. Still, strange to relate, they both afterwards declared to themselves that they had never had a more delightful walk in their lives.

Early next morning Captain Strickland started for Cumberland. There was an unwonted feeling of sadness at his heart which he could not overcome. He knew that if his quest were successful in the way his uncle and Father Spiridion hoped it would be, he and Janet would in all probability be farther divided than they were now. That is to say, if Miss Hope's father should prove to have been a man of family, or simply a very rich man, it was not improbable that his relatives might wish to claim her, in which case she would be lost to him for ever; and even the consolation of seeing her occasionally, on which he could count so long as she remained at Deepley Walls, would be his no longer. Such thoughts as these, however, would have no deterrent effect on his actions. He was fully determined to do all that lay in his power to bring the task that had been laid upon him to a successful issue. It had been decided that should Captain Strickland's investigation bring to light any facts in connection with her father, which it would be better for Janet's happiness and peace of mind that she should never know, such facts should be carefully withheld from her. Major Strickland and Father Spiridion reserved to themselves a certain discretionary power as to what should be told her, and what had better remain unsaid.

Before Captain Strickland had been two hours in Whitehaven he had hunted out the little church where the marriage of Edmund Fairfax and Helena Hope Chillington had been solemnized twenty years before. He compared the certificate he had brought with him with the original entry in the register, and he found them to tally in every particular. He inquired here and there till he had ferreted out the daughter of the woman who had been pew-opener at the church a quarter of a century before, and had been one of the witnesses to the marriage; but the woman herself had been dead a dozen years.

When he had got so far, Captain Strickland went back to his hotel and ordered a bed for the night. Whitehaven could furnish him with no further information. On the morrow he must go to Beckley. One important point had been proved: that the certificate in his possession was a bonâ fide copy of the register.

As soon as breakfast was over next morning he took a post-chaise and was driven to Beckley. It was eleven miles away, but there was no difficulty in finding the place. Since the date of Miss Chillington's residence there, quite a little hamlet had sprung up close by in connection with some extensive iron-ore works, which had now been in operation for several years. Beckley Grange was now tenanted by the manager of these works. Miss Bellenden, the aunt with whom Miss Chillington had lived for so long a time, and from whose house she had run away to get married, had been dead these eighteen

years. Captain Strickland was shown her tombstone in the village church.

He had not expected to pick up much information that would be of use to him at Beckley; it can hardly therefore be said that he was disappointed at finding every trace, except the epitaph, of a past state of things so entirely swept away. There was not even an old servant to be found, with a memory that would stretch back for a quarter of a century, from whom he might have gathered some reminiscences of Miss Chillington's life at Beckley, such as would have had a special interest for Janet, although they might have had no bearing whatever on the case he, Captain George, had in hand.

Sister Agnes, in her Confession, had made no mention by name of the particular village or place at which Mr. Fairfax was staying at the time he made her acquaintance. Consequently, for Captain Strickland to have gone inquiring among all the villages in the district respecting a certain Mr. Fairfax, who might or who might not have lived there for a few weeks some twenty years ago, would have been an almost hopeless task, and one that need not be resorted to till every other chance should have failed. The person called Captain Lant in the Confession, and he alone, if he were still alive, could clear up the mystery in a few words.

The first point was, where to find Captain Lant. The second, whether, when found, he would tell all that he was wanted to tell.

Captain Strickland left Whitehaven next day by express train for London. The first thing he did after reaching town was to deposit his portmanteau at the station hotel, and then take a hansom to his old club, the Janus, where he was sure to meet several brothers in the profession of arms to whom he was well known. After dining, he went to consult some files of Army Lists. In a List twenty years old he found the name of a Captain Lant as belonging to the two-hundred-and-fourth regiment, at that time in garrison at Portsmouth.

Captain Strickland belonged to a younger generation of military men than that which had been in vogue at the Janus twenty years previously. But the father of one of his most particular friends was not only an old military man, but an old club man and bon vivant into the bargain—a man who knew something good or bad—generally the latter—about everybody of note for the last quarter of a century. To this gentleman went Captain George. After explaining that he wanted to find out whether Captain Lant, who, twenty years previously, had belonged to the two-hundred-and-fourth Foot, were still alive, and if so where he could be found—he asked the favour of the old soldier's advice and assistance.

After turning the matter over in his mind for two or three minutes, the old gentleman said: "Put down on a slip of paper the particulars of what you want to know, and leave the case in my hands. You shall hear from me, one way or another, in the course of a few days."

Three days passed away without bringing any news, but on the

morning of the fourth Captain George found the following note at his club :

"Major Gregson presents his compliments to Captain Strickland, and begs to inform him that Captain (afterwards Colonel) Lant, formerly of the two-hundred-and-fourth Foot, is still living. Colonel Lant's present residence is Higham Lodge, near Richmond, Surrey."

Captain George suffered no grass to grow under his feet. That very afternoon he set out in quest of Higham Lodge. It was about two miles from Richmond, and he found it without difficulty. The footman who answered his ring told him that Colonel Lant was at home, but was only just recovering from a dangerous attack of gastric fever, and would hardly see any stranger at present. All the same, he would take Captain Strickland's card to his master.

Presently he returned. Colonel Lant would see Captain Strickland. So George followed the footman across the hall and up the wide, shallow staircase, and was ushered into the sick man's room.

"Good morning, sir," said Colonel Lant, a white-haired, sharp-featured man, with a brickdust complexion, that was somewhat toned down at present by illness. "A brother in arms is always welcome. Had you belonged to any other profession I had not seen you."

"I must apologise for my intrusion," said Captain Strickland. "Had I been aware that you were ill I would have put off my visit till a future date. My errand, in fact, is entirely of a private nature, and is not so pressing but that it will stand over till another time. With your permission, I will call upon you again this day week or fortnight."

"Not a bit of it, my boy; not a bit of it," said the Colonel. "Now that you are here, we may as well cook your goose and have done with you. May I enquire as to the particular object which has brought you so far from town?"

"My object was to ask you whether, once upon a time—say twenty years ago—you were acquainted with a gentleman of the name of Fairfax—Mr. Edmund Fairfax, to be precise?"

The sick man coughed uneasily, raised himself on one elbow, and stared fixedly at his visitor.

"And pray, sir, what may be your object in asking such a question?" he said at length.

"That I will tell you presently," answered Captain George. "May I assume that you were acquainted with Mr. Edmund Fairfax?"

"You may assume what the deuce you like, sir," said the peppery Colonel. "It seems to me that there is a great deal too much assumption about you. But go on. What are you driving at next?"

"The Mr. Edmund Fairfax to whom I allude was married at Whitehaven to a certain young lady, Miss Chillington by name. If I am rightly informed, you were a witness to that marriage. Mr. Fairfax and his wife went abroad. A year later Mr. Fairfax was

unfortunately drowned in one of the Swiss lakes. You were the bearer of the news of his death to his widow, who shortly after that event returned to England. I hope, sir, that you follow me thus far?"

"Oh, I follow you easily enough, never fear!" replied the irascible old soldier. "You tell your tale as glibly as if you had learnt it by heart beforehand. But you have not done yet. When you have come to an end, I may perhaps question the truth of your statements in toto."

"From the date of her arrival in England up to the time of her death, which event happened a few weeks ago, Mrs. Fairfax lived in the utmost seclusion; in fact, she lived under an assumed name. But, sir, she had a daughter. That daughter is now grown up, and is acquainted with her mother's story. It is as her advocate that I am here to-day."

"A youthful Daniel come to judgment!" sneered the Colonel. "Well, sir, granting for the sake of argument that there may be some slight residuum of truth in what you have just told me—what then? You have something still in the background."

"Simply this, Colonel Lant. Mrs. Fairfax never knew, nor beyond a few questions put to you on a certain occasion, did she ever seek to know, anything concerning the antecedents and social position of her husband. When once her husband was lost to her, all minor considerations were regarded with perfect indifference. But as respects Miss Fairfax, the case is very different. Those who have her interests most at heart—that is to say, my uncle, Major Strickland, and another old friend of Mrs. Fairfax, who is associated with him in this matter—are naturally anxious that Miss Fairfax should no longer be left in doubt as to her parentage and proper position in the world. I am their envoy to you. You alone can tell them where and how to look for that which they want to find."

"And so pretty Mrs. Fairfax is dead," said the Colonel after a pause. "Ay! ay! each of us must go in turn. I had a narrow squeak myself a few days ago, I can tell you. Sweet Mrs. Fairfax! and dead, you say? Twenty years have gone by since I saw her last; but I have often thought about her, and always as being young and pretty. I never could think of her as touched by Time's finger: as having grey hair, and wrinkles, and all that, you know. For ever sweet and young. I was half in love with her myself, and should have been wholly so had not Fairfax been beforehand with me. But she was far away too good for him, and for me too, for that matter. And now, dead!"

Colonel Lant had wandered so far back into the past that he was near forgetting the presence of Captain Strickland. The latter sat without speaking. The sick man's half-conscious revelations were sufficient to prove that he was on the right track. At length the Colonel came back, with a sigh and a start, to the practical present.

"A daughter, did you not say—a grown-up daughter? Dear me!

And in the interests of this daughter you want to know something about the antecedents and history of Ned Fairfax. Well! well! it was a bad piece of business, and some reparation is certainly due."

"I tell you, sir, that some reparation is certainly due," re-asserted the Colonel in his most peppery style. "And I'll e'en make a clean breast of it while I've a chance of doing so—though, mind you, whether Ned Fairfax would approve of such a step on my part is more than I can say. Probably he wouldn't. But that don't matter. If he knew I lay dying, he would not trouble himself to come twenty miles to see me. Then why should I study his interests so particularly? I may tell you, Captain What's-your-name, in confidence, mind, that when I lay here a few days ago so ill that I was doubtful whether I should ever get round again, this very business of which we have been talking, and of which as yet you don't know all the particulars, stood out very black in my memory, and troubled my mind not a little. Now, I'm not going to die this time, but while I've the chance I'll rub out that little score, so that when my Black Monday really does come, it may not crop up against me for the second time, and stare me in the face with the ugly look of an unrepented wrong."

Captain George sat without speaking. It was quite evident to him that Colonel Lant was one of those people who love to hear themselves talk, but who pay small regard to the wishes or opinions of others. Left to himself, the Colonel would probably let fall more valuable information of his own accord than could be elicited from him by the keenest cross-examination.

"An ugly piece of business!" resumed the Colonel. "Many a time since then have I felt sorry that I allowed myself to be talked into doing what I did by Ned Fairfax's plausible tongue. For one thing, I owed him money at that time, and he might have made it hot for me had I refused to comply with his wishes. The marriage itself was all right and proper, but the story of the drowning in one of the Swiss lakes was a pure forgery. You may well look surprised. Ned Fairfax was no more drowned than I was: in fact, to my certain knowledge he was alive only three months ago.

The Colonel paused to refresh himself with a pinch of snuff, and then went on again. "When Edmund Fairfax married Miss Chillington, the fact of such a ceremony having taken place was most jealously guarded from all his people. His expectations at that juncture might be said to depend upon his remaining a bachelor. But he saw Miss Chillington and fell in love with her, and he was not a man to let anything thwart him in the gratification of his likes or dislikes. He married Miss Chillington and risked the future. All went well with the young couple for a year or more. They lived a quiet, secluded life, and were tolerably happy: not that Fairfax was a man who would have been happy for any length of time in the quiet trammels of domestic life. But he had not had time to get

thoroughly tired before the thunder-cloud burst. He was summoned back to England by his uncle, to marry the young lady, a great heiress, who had been set down for him in the family programme. The predicament was an awkward one, but Fairfax was equal to the occasion. At that time he was close upon five-and-twenty years of age. He had spent one fortune already, and he was booked to come into another on his twenty-fifth birthday. He would come into another, that is, provided he were willing to change his name from Fairfax to that of the old lady, a distant relation, by whom the fortune was bequeathed. Fairfax had no foolish predilection for one name over another when there was money to be got by the change. His plan was to come to England, leaving his first wife abroad; to wait for the birthday which would at once give him a fortune and allow him to change his name; after that to marry the heiress with all convenient speed. The story of his death was cleverly concocted, and, with my assistance, as cleverly carried out. Mrs. Fairfax believed the story, and Ned knew her gentle nature too well to fear that she would ever make any inquiry as to his history or family, they being topics on which he had declined to enlighten her when he was supposed to be alive. The result of the plot as regards Mrs. Fairfax, you probably know better than I do. She accepted her fate, and disappeared from her husband's path, which was precisely what he wanted. The result as regarded Fairfax himself was something different from his expectations. He changed his name, and he came into his fortune, but his bride that was to have been died two months before the day fixed for the wedding. Fairfax bore his loss with great equanimity. He smoked more cigars than before, and bought a commission in a marching regiment. A few months later he was ordered out to India. Before leaving Europe he set on foot a private inquiry, having for its object the discovery of the whereabouts of Mrs. Fairfax. But the inquiry elicited nothing beyond its own heavy expenses, and it is possible that Fairfax was quite as well pleased that it did not.

"Well, sir, my friend Edmund proceeded to India, and there he remained for several years. He worked himself up to a captaincy, and he might have done exceedingly well had not the cursed spirit of gambling eaten into his very soul. But he was and is a born gambler, and will be so to the end of the chapter. He would gamble for the nails in his own coffin if he had nothing else to play for. His second fortune went as his first had gone. Just as he was on the verge of ruin some unpleasantness in connection with a gambling transaction induced him to sell out and return to England. Since that time, how he has contrived to live and appear like a gentleman is a problem best known to himself. And now, sir, I think I have told you all that it concerns you to know respecting my friend Mr. Edmund Fairfax."

"All but one thing, Colonel Lant, and that a most essential one."

"What is it?"

"You state that Mr. Fairfax changed his name some time after his marriage with Miss Chillington. By what name is he now known?"

"He is known as Captain Edmund Ducie, and his London address when I last heard from him was 2A, Tremaine Street, Piccadilly."

These particulars were duly taken down by Captain Strickland in his pocket-book. It must be borne in mind that the name of Ducie sounded quite strange in his ears. He had never heard of the Great Hara Diamond.

"As I said before, I don't know whether my friend Fairfax, or rather Ducie, would altogether approve of my telling you so much of his history and private affairs," said the Colonel. "But I don't care greatly whether he approves or does the other thing. I've eased my mind of a burden, the weight of which I have felt several times of late; and since there is a child, it is only right that she should know her father."

After some further conversation, in the course of which he elicited from the old soldier sundry minor particulars having reference to his errand, Captain Strickland took his leave and returned to town.

The day was still early, and George drove direct from the terminus to 2A, Tremaine Street, Piccadilly. But Captain Ducie had removed from Tremaine Street nearly two years before, and George was directed to a much humbler locality, but no great distance away. Here the rooms were still held in Captain Ducie's name, so George was told, but the Captain himself had not been seen there for nearly six months. The gentleman had better go down to the Piebalds, which used to be Captain Ducie's club, and there he might perhaps learn where the latter was to be found. So spoke the janitress, and to the Piebalds Captain Strickland repaired.

Here he got what he wanted when the porter had "taken stock" of him and had satisfied himself that he could not possibly be a dun. Captain Ducie's present address, he was told, was the Royal George Hotel, St. Helier, Jersey.

That night's post took a long letter addressed to Major Strickland. George waited in London for an answer to it. One came sooner than he expected. It was in the shape of a telegram:—

"Start for Jersey at once. I will write to you there by next post."

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### AT THE "ROYAL GEORGE."

On the sixth day after the arrival of Captain Ducie at St. Helier, the Weymouth boat brought over two passengers who had attracted more attention from their fellow-travellers than any other two people on board.

The elder of the two was a white-haired venerable-looking gentleman who wore gold-rimmed spectacles and was richly dressed in furs. A cap made out of the skin of some wild animal, with the tail hanging down behind, fitted his head like a helmet, and gave him quite an un English appearance.

His companion was a very beautiful young woman of three or four-and-twenty, richly but quietly attired: evidently his daughter.

When, on the arrival of the boat, the luggage was fished out of the hold, several adventurous spirits pressed forward to read the label on the young lady's boxes. This was what rewarded their curiosity:

MISS VAN LOAL,

PASSENGER TO JERSEY.

"Drive to the Royal George," said the old gentleman, as he and his daughter stepped into a fly on the pier, and several of the curious who had taken him for a foreigner were surprised to find that he spoke English like one to the manner born. But had any inhabitant of Tydsbury chanced to be on the pier that evening, he would have recognised in the foreign-looking gentleman and his superb daughter, two towns-folk of his own—to wit, Mr. Solomon Madgin and his daughter Mirpah. With what object they had come so far from home, and under an assumed name, we shall presently learn.

Captain Ducie, cigar in mouth, was lounging at the door of the Royal George when the fly drove up in which Mr. and Miss Van Loal were seated. Mirpah's beauty took his eye. He removed his cigar, stepped back a pace or two, and gazed. Mirpah's eyes met his She had a presentiment that she saw before her the Captain Ducie of whom she had read so much in her brother's reports from Bon Repos, and in whose possession the Great Hara Diamond was said to be. Mirpah's eyes fell, a faint tinge of colour came into her cheek, and she and her father passed forward into the hotel.

"By Jove!" was Captain Ducie's sole comment aloud. Then he pulled his hat further over his brows, resumed his cigar, and lounged off towards the pier.

This scene had been witnessed by a pale-faced, spectacled young man from a window of Button's Hotel on the other side of the way. As soon as Ducie had disappeared round the corner this young man left his place of espionage, came out into the street, and crossed over to the Royal George. Here he asked for and was conducted to the sitting-room of Mr. Van Loal, but he sent the waiter back and opened the door of the room himself.

"My dear James!" "My dear brother!" were the exclamations that greeted his entrance.

"Hush! not quite so loud, if you please," said cautious James, with a warning finger in the air. Then, having carefully closed the door, he shook his father warmly by the hand, and turned to embrace his

sister. Whereupon a long conversation ensued among the three, which need not be detailed here.

Instead of dining in his own room, as he had hitherto done, Captain Ducie made his appearance at the table d'hôte this evening. He went down early, and there, just as if it had been pre-arranged that they should meet, he found Mr. Van Loal and his daughter.

The evenings were growing rather chilly, and a small fire had been lighted. Mr. Van Loal, now stripped of his furs and appearing in ordinary evening dress, with the most expansive of shirt-fronts and the stiffest of white neckcloths, had got as near the fire as he well could, and was warming his thin white hands over the flickering blaze.

Mirpah, with one elbow resting on the chimney-piece, was standing near him, looking, Ducie thought, even more beautiful in her black filmy evening dress than she had looked in her travelling costume. One thing Ducie could not help noticing—that on the hands both of father and daughter there glittered several very magnificent rings. Other jewellery they wore none.

As Captain Ducie advanced up the room, Miss Van Loal crossed over to the other side to look at some stuffed birds. Accidentally or purposely, she dropped her handkerchief. It had scarcely touched the ground before Captain Ducie had recovered it. With a smile and a bow, he gave it back to its owner.

The ice had been broken, and presently Mr. Van Loal and the Captain were conversing easily and confidentially about the island, its scenery, its history and its climate. Mirpah glided back to her father's side. She did not join in the conversation, but once or twice Ducie caught her eye fixed on his face with an expression in them that was flattering to his vanity.

When dinner was announced he did not fail to secure for himself the chair next to that of Mirpah. There was something about this dark-eyed beauty that took his fancy amazingly. His powers of fascination were in danger of growing rusty from disuse. He was glad that an opportunity had arisen which would allow him to prove, were it only for his own satisfaction, that his old prowess with the sex had not quite deserted him.

Here was no fashionable young lady, the butterfly of a hundred drawing-rooms, to subdue; but something far more unconventional: a woman altogether unused to so-called fashionable life, as his critical glance had told him in a moment; but still an undoubted lady, and the possessor of a pair of the most unfathomable eyes that his own had ever gazed into. Therefore he sat down to the siege he had proposed to himself with an alacrity that was infinitely refreshing to him after his long severance from the delights of female society.

Later on, Captain Ducie proposed a stroll along the pier. Mr. Van Loal and his daughter at once assented.

The night was warm and a full moon was sailing through the sky.

Faint strains of music came wafted from afar, and mingled with the plash of the incoming tide. Could anyone have questioned Captain Ducie on the point, he would have declared that his "spooning" days had come to an end twenty years before, and he would have believed his own statement. Men in love he was in the habit of regarding with good-natured cynicism, as though they were in a state of temporary insanity superinduced by their own folly, and were not to be held accountable like ordinary mortals. But to-night, what with the moonlight, the music, the rhythmic beat of the waves on the sands, and the propinquity of Mirpah Van Loal, Captain Ducie felt the first delicious symptoms of a fever to which his blood had been a stranger for years.

After he had parted for the night from Van Loal and his charming daughter, and was in the solitude of his own bedroom, he laughed aloud to think how very like a greenhorn who had fallen in love for the first time he had felt that evening. He recognised the feeling, and was contemptuous of himself even while revelling in the unaccustomed sweetness. It was a sweetness that waited on his dreams all the night long, and when he opened his eyes next morning he felt as though Time's finger had moved back the figures on the dial of his life, and that he was not only a boy in years again, but also—and that would have been the greater miracle of the two—once more a boy at heart. But he was a middle-aged cynic again the moment he put his foot out of bed. There is no disenchanter like the clear cold light of morning. It was not that he deemed Mirpah one whit less beautiful than she had seemed in his eyes the previous night. He was savage with himself for allowing any woman, however fascinating she might be, to touch his cold heart with the flame of a torch that for him had long been quenched in the waters of Lethe.

Nevertheless, by the time he had discussed his breakfast, he was by no means sorry to remember that he had an engagement at eleven o'clock to drive Mr. Van Loal and his daughter to Grève-de-Lecq. It would really be a pleasant mode of spending the lazy autumn day, and he would take very good care that Mademoiselle Van Loal's witching eyes did not cast a spell round him for the second time.

Forewarned is forearmed, and, after all his experience of the sex, it would be a pitiful tale indeed if he allowed himself to be entangled by any young lady, however charming she might be, of whom, as in the present case, he knew next to nothing.

Having made this declaration to himself, he looked at his watch to see how near the time was to eleven.

"Curious name, Van Loal," he muttered. "Is it Dutch? or Belgian? or what is it? It smacks of the Low Countries. The man who bears such a name ought never to drink anything weaker than schiedam. In the present case, however, both the old boy and his daughter must be English, whatever their ancestors may have been: they speak without the slightest foreign accent. Mademoiselle talks

about the old fellow having just retired from business. What business was he, I wonder? There is something cosmopolitan about him that makes it difficult to guess in what particular line he has made his money. A few indirect questions may perhaps elicit the required information: not that it matters to me in anyway—not in the least."

The day was a pleasant one. Captain Ducie drove Mr. Van Loal and his daughter to some of the prettiest spots in the island. They had an al fresco luncheon in a sheltered corner of a lovely bay. After the meal was over, Mr. Van Loal wandered away to botanise by himself. Captain Ducie and Mirpah were left to entertain each other.

Said the latter: "It is quite amusing to see papa so enthusiastic after rare ferns and mosses. It is a pursuit so totally opposed to the previous occupations of his life that on this lovely island, and amid such quiet scenes, I can almost imagine that he would gradually grow young again, as people in fairy tales are sometimes said to do, and that in this botanising freak we have the first indication of the change."

"We cannot quite afford to have him changed into a young prince," said Ducie, "or else what would become of you? You would have to diminish into babyhood, and however pleasant a state that may be, I for one cannot wish you otherwise than as you are."

"You must have graduated with honours in the art of paying compliments, Captain Ducie. Long study and the practice of many years have been needed to make you such an adept. I congratulate you on the result."

Captain Ducie laughed. "A very fair hit," he said, "but in the present case totally undeserved. Had I been a young fellow of eighteen I should have blushed and fidgeted, and have thought you excessively cruel. But being an old fellow of forty or more, I can enjoy your retort while being myself the butt at which your shaft is aimed. It speaks well for the purity of Mr. Van Loal's conscience that in the intervals of a busy life, and one which has doubtless its own peculiar cares and anxieties, he can yet enjoy so refined an amusement as that of fern hunting."

"That remark ought to elicit some information from her as to the old boy's métier," added Ducie under his breath. "Is he a retired grocer? or a sleeping partner in some old-established bank?"

"Papa's life has indeed been a busy one," answered Mirpah, "but for the future, I hope that he will have ample opportunity to indulge in whatever mode of passing his time may suit his fancy best. With the real business of life, that is, with the money-making part of it, I trust that he has done for ever. What his occupation was you would never guess, Captain Ducie. Come, now, I will wager you half-a-dozen pairs of gloves that out of the same number of guesses you do

not succeed in naming papa's business—and it was a business, and in no way connected with any of the learned professions."

"Done!" exclaimed Ducie eagerly, holding out his hand to clench the bet. The tips of Miss Van Loal's fingers rested for an instant in his palm, and Ducie felt that he could well afford to lose.

He was silent for a minute or two, pretending to think. In the end, his six guesses stood as follows: He guessed that Mr. Van Loal had been either a banker, or a stock broker, or a brewer, or a drysalter, or an architect, or some sort of a contractor.

"Lost!" cried Mirpah in high glee, when the sixth guess was proclaimed. "Papa was none of those things you have named. You have not gone far enough a-field in your guesses: you have not sufficiently exercised your inventive faculties. No, Captain Ducie, my father was neither a banker, nor anything else that you have specified. *He was a Diamond Merchant.*"

Mirpah allowed these last words to slide from between her lips as quietly as though she were making the most commonplace statement in the world; but their effect upon Captain Ducie was apparently to paralyse his faculties for a few moments. All the colour left his face; his eyes, full of trouble and suspicion, sought those of Mirpah, anxious to read there whether or no she had any knowledge of his great secret—whether the stab she had given him was an intentional or an accidental one. Involuntarily his hand sought the folds of his waistcoat. He breathed again. His treasure was still there. In the dark luminous eyes of the beautiful girl before him he read no hint of any crafty secret, of any sinister design. It was nothing more, then, than a strange coincidence. He had been fooled by his own fears. Had this Van Loal and his daughter by some mysterious means become acquainted with his secret, and had they come to Jersey with any ulterior designs against himself, the fact that Van Loal had been a diamond merchant would have been something to conceal as undoubtedly provocative of suspicion. The very fact of such a statement having been made was his surest guarantee that he had nothing sinister to guard against. He had frightened himself with a shadow. The magnificent diamond rings worn by the old man and his daughter were at once accounted for.

"I am afraid that you regret having made such a reckless wager," said Mirpah, with an arch look at the Captain. "But, indeed, you ought to pay your forfeit, were it only for having guessed that poor papa had been a drysalter—whatever that may be. I suppose it has something to do with the curing of herrings or hams. A drysalter!" and Mirpah's clear laugh rang out across the sands.

"I own the wager fairly lost," said Ducie, as he prepared to light a cigar; "and will cheerfully pay the forfeit. Had I guessed for a week it would still have been lost. I hardly knew that there were such people as professional diamond merchants in this country."

"They form a small corporation, it is true, but by no means an unimportant one in their own estimation. The professed jewellers, the men who keep the magnificent shops, would be but poorly off without the diamond dealers to fall back upon. We—the Van Loals—have been members of the guild for three centuries—not in England, but in Amsterdam, where our name is a name of honour. Papa was born there, but he came to England when he was a young man and married an English girl, and from that time he has lived in the country of his adoption. He has promised that next spring we shall visit Amsterdam together; then, for the first time, I shall see the land where my ancestors lived and died."

Mr. Van Loal came up at this juncture, and the semi-confidential talk between Mirpah and Captain Ducie came to an end.

At the table d'hôte that evening Ducie sat between father and daughter. He exerted himself to the utmost to make an agreeable impression on both of them. After dinner the two men had a smoke and a stroll on the pier. They were both men of the world, and had a score of topics in common on which they could talk fluently and well. Ducie's easy, languid, far niente style of looking at everything that did not impinge on his own personality formed a piquant contrast to the shrewd, calculating, matter-of-fact way of looking at the same subjects which distinguished the soi-disant Van Loal. They kept each other company till a late hour.

When Ducie got to his own room he bolted the door and lighted a last cigar. He wanted to meditate quietly for half an hour. No man could be more clear-sighted than he was as regarded his own faults and follies in all cases where his conscience was not brought into question. To-night he at once acknowledged to himself that he was more deeply in love with Mirpah Van Loal than he had thought ever to be with any woman again. He had sneered at himself, before setting out in the morning, for his infatuation of the previous night, but now the second night had come, and he was twice as much infatuated as before. He did not sneer at himself to-night, but he set himself critically to consider why he had fallen in love, and whither this new disturbing influence in his life was likely to lead him.

But the why and the wherefore of the cases that have to be adjudicated before the tribunal of Love can seldom be argued coolly by either of the parties chiefly concerned. Their statements are sure to be ex parte ones, their arguments to be coloured by personal feeling, while the philtre that is working in their blood obscures their logic and clouds their brains. In stating the case before himself, the first question Ducie asked was: "What is the particular charm about Miss Van Loal that has induced me to make such a fool of myself at my time of life?"

"Well," he answered himself, leisurely puffing, with hands buried deep in pockets—"that there is a peculiar charm about Miss Van

Loal is a fact which I, for one, cannot dispute. She does not belong to the monde, and never will belong to it, for which I like her none the worse. She is fresh and unconventional, and much better educated than most ladies of fashion. There is no mawkish sentimentality about her. She is not a boarding-school miss, but a woman, intelligent and full of clear, calm, good sense. Good-tempered too, unless I am greatly mistaken, and that goes for much with a man of my years. Lastly, she is very nice-looking; beautiful would not be too strong a word to apply in her case, and her beauty is of a kind one does not see every day. She is in good style, too, and with a little training would hold her own anywhere.

"As to whither this new passion is leading me?—If at the end of another week I like Miss Van Loal as well as I like her now, I shall make her an offer of marriage. It is by no means certain that she will accept me, but should she do so, I suppose my people will say that I have made a low marriage, and will cut me accordingly. Well, I should rather enjoy being cut under such circumstances. There's not one of the whole tribe that would give me another sovereign to save me from starving. Thanks to one little fact, I shall never again have occasion to ask them for a sovereign. Why, then, should I not marry Miss Van Loal? I have an idea that I could be happier with her as my wife than I have ever been before. I should no longer feel the sting of poverty. I could afford to live a life of thorough respectability, and I would never look on a card again. There are some lovely nooks on the Continent, and—but, bah! why pursue the dream any farther? That it will prove to be anything more than a dream I dare scarcely hope."

He rose and flung away the end of his cigar, and began to prepare for bed. "By what singular fatality does it happen that Mr. Van Loal, a dealer in diamonds, has been brought en rapport with me, who hold in my possession one of the finest diamonds in the world? In any case, I have made his acquaintance most opportunely. Through his assistance I may be enabled to find a purchaser for my gem."

*(To be continued.)*

# CHILDREN'S DREAMS.

WHEN babies smile in their sleep some will say angels are whispering to them. Yet when they are old enough (though not yet out of the age of innocence) to repeat their dreams, it is not always of angels that these are found to have been. Not always are they derived from fleeting, unconscious recollections of the home whence they have so lately come. On the contrary, it is chiefly, as Charles Lamb observes, during the period of sinless infancy that shapes of terror will intrude upon the midnight pillow—that the slumberer will start from dreams "to which the reveries of the cell-damned murderer are tranquility." How vividly does the gentle essayist recall these helpless agonies of his own infancy. We almost fancy we can see him start from slumber on some murky night with a dread foreboding, which was sure to realise itself, of seeing some frightful spectre.

A friend has told us that during a long period of his childhood he maintained the habit of praying every night, before going to sleep, that no bad dreams might trouble him; acting in curious, unthinking coincidence with good old Bishop Ken, who, generations ago, resorted to the same expedient. To further his prayers, the little boy, in a spirit of philosophy beyond his years, would try to concentrate his ideas on all the most humdrum things he could think of, his thoughts usually settling on the figure of an old Welsh landlord, a small man with a brown wig, whom he had occasionally visited with his father, and who, to his childish fancy, appeared the very personification of common-place.

Harriet Martineau relates that, of her many childish fancies, perhaps none was so terrible as a dream she had at four years old. "I dreamed," she says, "that we children were taking a walk with our nursemaid . . . . Out of the public-house there came a stag, with prodigious antlers. Passing the pump, it crossed the road to us, and made a polite bow, with its head on one side, and with a scrape of one foot; after which it pointed with its foot to the public-house, and spoke to me, inviting me in. The maid declined, and turned to go home. Then came the terrible part. By the time we were at our own door it was dusk, and we went up the steps in the dark; but in the kitchen it was bright sunshine. My mother was standing at the dresser, breaking sugar; and she lifted me up, and set me in the sun, and gave me a bit of sugar." [A most unexpected transition into *sweetness and light!*] "Such was the dream which froze me with horror! Who shall say why?" concludes the narrator, looking back from her strong-minded maturity to that vividly-remem-

bered childish dream, and utterly unable to understand "what the fright was about."

Children, perhaps oftener than their elders, are brought into relation with the unseen world by dreams. A curious one was that told of Mrs. Taylor, of Ongar, whose father died when she was six years old. "On the night of his death," writes her daughter Ann, "she dreamed that she was in a desolate and shattered building, through the rents of which she could see the stars. Suddenly, among them her father's form appeared, departing upward in a chariot, by gestures taking leave of her, and encouraging her to follow. On waking, she was told that he was dead." Her childish heart could have derived but little comfort from the dream, for we are told that to the excess of her grief her life was nearly sacrificed.

On the spirit of many a little innocent one, in its waking night hours, is reflected a shadow, faint but awful, of the Judgment Day. Few deem how heavily on their comparatively sinless hearts weighs the burden of the sin of the world, and of the wrath of God pursuing it. Though few, we trust, have passed through the experience of Wordsworth, who describes himself as quaking in his bed, when four years old, "in sharp conflict of spirit" on the subject of the Divine permission of Evil. "Nothing but faith," says the poet in his later years, "can keep you quiet and at peace with such awful problems pressing on you— Faith that what you know not now you will know in God's good time." An echo of the conclusions come to by the Psalmist long before: "Be still, and know that I am God."

A little boy we knew once dreamed a very remarkable dream. A friend of his father, one of the most genial and amiable of men, had lately died; and the child dreamed that he was present at his trial in the other world, and heard angels and other spirits pleading for him at the great Tribunal: bringing forward the good-natured actions he had performed, the generosities he had been so ready with. And to them all God answered sorrowfully: "But he never thought of ME."

People know not what they do when they let fall hints and prophecies of disaster and mysterious change on the tender spirit of a child, devoid of faculties to reason them away. One of the saddest stories we have ever come across was that of a little girl who, in the year 1881, died of fear in the night in consequence of old Mother Shipton's ridiculous prophecy. Who can guess at the terrors of the little creature alone in her small bed, with strained eyes staring out into the darkness, waiting on all those midnight sounds which are apt to awaken eerie feelings in the strongest mind. Now watching for the intimation of approaching ruin; now burying her face close from sight and sound beneath the bed-clothes, her heart beating to suffocation with its pent-up fright. While words of doom, whose meaning she had no clue to discern, rang dreadful through her brain, putting her weak prayers to flight. But when darkness and oblivion fell indeed, and the little breast had heaved its last, may we not think o

ner as waking from her troubled dreams of Dies Iræ, to be revived by the soft airs, the healing light of Paradise, to have her fears dispelled for ever in the security of God's presence?

Yet when children are afraid at night, it is not so much of God as of some bogie of man's invention. "It isn't very often God is angry with me, I don't think," said a small boy to us. Another little friend of ours once dreamed some danger was impending over him, and that God held him tightly in His arms and would not let him go.

Some children transcend the opium-eater in their capacity for seeing visions, projecting clearly defined images before them on the darkness; strange figures, large saucer eyes, like those of the dog in the fairy-tale, floating detached from any setting; or even fiendish faces. It is curious to find De Quincey comparing his experiences on the matter with a little boy, exchanging notes on the frequency and the manner of these appearances. "I can tell them to go, and they go," said the child; "but sometimes they come when I don't tell them to come."

A word, a sound, a shadow will start a child's imagination into wild activity. Unreasoning fears will run riot in him; a host of dismal possibilities will suggest themselves; and we only who can remember back into the days of our infancy can sympathize with those uncontrollable terrors which make it a crueller punishment to some children to be left alone in the dark than the infliction of any bodily punishment could be. Their cry, like Goethe's when his last night gloomed upon him, is for light. And from what untold miseries would a night-lamp save them! In a story we read long years ago, an infant was represented as thus crying for the light. His mother responding to the call, a philosophical discussion ensued between her and her little one; and, by a series of artful questions, she entrapped him into the acknowledgment that the candle he craved was nothing but wax and cotton. "And how can wax and cotton help you?" was, if we remember right, her triumphant conclusion as she left him, if not reconciled to the darkness, yet beguiled by the sophistry into a delusive submission. We doubt not, however, that presently he was quaking again with all his former fears, which, perhaps, were no worse after all than the spurious comfort he had been subjected to.

We knew of a little girl of lively imagination who, on being put to bed, would always insist on her elder sister closing her eyes for her before leaving the room, the little creature being possessed of the fancy that with a kind parting touch on her lids, there would be less chance of her "seeing anything" in the darkness. She would have found a sympathizer with her fears in the old naval officer who once told Mary Somerville that he never opened his eyes in the dark for fear of seeing something.

Few indeed of wise or simple are free from this strange horror of darkness. We find those of every temperament and of every capacity,

not only poetic, but practical, confess to it; from the great philosopher like Sir David Brewster, who owned himself susceptible to eerie feelings when alone at night in a house supposed to be haunted, to the least imaginative child.

"The things that day most minds, at night doe most appeare," says Spenser; and this is especially true with regard to children, perhaps because they mind things more. It should, however, be an additional inducement to those who have charge of them to keep their days as free from pain as possible.

The present system of cramming in schools is not without its effect on children's dreams. Not only are their waking thoughts weighed down beneath the unrelaxing load of lessons to which they are bound, but the burden clings to them through the hours set apart for rest. We have known them to rave of figures in their sleep. The dream Thackeray records of his venerable sexagenarian friend is doubtless a frequent one with little boys. Dream-whippings may be less painful in their effects than the real thing, but are none the less, we should think, a highly disagreeable intrusion on the sanctities of sleep. Yet it is not always the happiest children who have the happiest dreams. No amount of care to preserve them from the knowledge of evil, and even of distress, can avail to secure their slumbers from ill dreams. Witness the case of that "nurse-child of optimism," Leigh Hunt's little son, to whose sufferings in the matter Charles Lamb makes pathetic allusion.

It is not enough that children should be kept in ignorance of evil, their sensitive spirits are so alive to every passing influence that suggestions are surely borne to them of the sin and sorrow all around. They have intuitions, if not discernment, of the existence of much concerning which their elders suppose them to be altogether in the dark. The expulsive power of soothing thoughts is perhaps the only remedy for all night fears. The writer partly attributes her own exemption in childhood from these tortures to a habit somehow acquired of repeating to herself before going to sleep the first stanza of Bishop Ken's evening hymn. We could scarcely tell what spell of peace it bore, whether it lay in the music of the words, in its opening note of praise, which seemed to lift the spirit into regions of eternal calm, or in the trustful rapture of its prayer; but "the blessings of the light" seemed still to linger on the strain; the darkness was but as the shadow of the "Almighty wings" beneath which we were gathered.

"Give me a great thought to die on," asked Herder on his deathbed. And a peaceful thought to fall asleep on, a thought in which, as Herbert hath it, "more than in bed we rest," is a mighty help for children of every growth towards healthy slumber.

PAULINE W. ROOSE.

# POOR SIR JOHN.

By the Author of "Mrs. Jerningham's Journal."

## I.

"I ALMOST wonder you are not afraid of letting Maud have so much to do with that curate; what with the choir and the school, and coming up here to settle parish matters, either with you or with her, they really do see a good deal of each other."

Sir Hildebrand Courtney first stared in his friend's face as if he did not understand what he was saying, and then laughed softly in his peculiarly refined, pleasant way.

He was a remarkably handsome man, of about forty-five years of age; well tended, well preserved, well dressed. His complexion might be almost too delicate, and the arrangement of his whiskers too perfect, but his nose was slightly hooked and looked commanding. He was an aristocrat, every inch of him, from the crown of his handsome head, whereon the slightly grizzled hair was neatly brushed, to the soles of his well-shaped feet, covered by equally well-made boots. Seated in a carved oak chair cushioned with blue velvet, surrounded by all the comforts of an elegantly-furnished study (being evidence at once of money and taste), looking through the open plate-glass doors of the window on his own exquisite flower-gardens, and beyond them, over his own lovely sweep of wooded park, he would have made an admirable picture of an admirable thing—a real *English gentleman*.

"My *dear* Markham," he said, with gentle emphasis, after an expressive pause; "you don't think *my* girl could forget herself so far as to think of the curate?"

"Well, no, I don't," replied his friend, a little ashamed of his suggestion; "only it struck me it might be rather dangerous."

Again Sir Hildebrand laughed pleasantly, while his eyes glanced with rather larger satisfaction over his beautiful domain. The church spire stood up white in the sunlight from the hollow below, and a slender column of curling blue smoke rose at its side.

"There he lives," said the Baronet, contentedly, "in his cottage, with his one servant and all his nice little things about him. Fancy Maud the mistress of that menage, calculating how many pounds of tea she may use in a month, and perhaps leaving off sugar in it because sugar has risen a penny a pound; ordering mutton chops and potatoes for dinner, with the possible addition of a pudding on Sundays; and having her dresses made in the village! Ha, ha, ha!"

Both the gentlemen laughed.

"No," continued Maud's father, thoughtfully; "there are privileges attached to a high position, and there are penalties also: our

daughters cannot marry for love unless we take care that they love the proper person. I hope to see Maud a happy wife one of these days, but she has been so brought up that to marry out of her own sphere, to become a poor man's wife, would to her seem as great an improbability as it does to me."

"Yes, you have taken great care of Maud, and she looks and moves a girl-queen, who ought not to be degraded to a lower place."

"Who *ought* not and *could* not. Maud, as she is, is not only the result of what *I* have done for her, but of what my forefathers have done time out of mind for their children. What Maud and I feel is not a personal thing born in us and for us, it is a legacy handed down through a line of ancestors untarnished in name and fame: a race of which I believe this nineteenth century representative may say that the men are all sans peur and the women sans reproche."

Sir Hildebrand spoke calmly, without excitement, because he gave utterance to ideas too familiar to his mind to cause excitement when spoken; but there was a noble look in his face and in his bright, dark eyes that marked him as worthy of the race he praised. A stamp, so to speak, set on him from his birth, and in some degree separating him from the herd of common men.

"And neither you nor Maud will be the first Courtneys to descend from their estate," replied Markham.

"No," said Sir Hildebrand, smiling. "I feel as secure of Maud as of myself."

"And Sir Arthur Torrington comes home to-morrow," remarked Mr. Markham, a little shyly. "What a difference his cousin's death has made to him."

"He is an excellent fellow, and all the better, I doubt not, for his early hardships, since he had the good blood, you know. A clerk under Government in the Woods and Forests, and then, all of a sudden, a little paragraph in a newspaper, a man is drowned out in Australia, and he is a baronet with ten thousand a year."

"And you think he likes Maud? She is to be a second Princess Dagmar, is she not? First destined to Sir John, she marries Sir Arthur?"

"I hope so, only without the pain of the Princess's lot. She never was engaged or attached to poor John, though this marriage was the wish of my heart, and would no doubt have come about if he had lived to return home. His father and I had planned it, and in these cases if fathers act judiciously they can generally execute their plans."

"It was curious, though, that property and title should go to a distant cousin, with whose people there had been such a bitter quarrel."

"Yes; and John took the quarrel up, poor fellow, and hated them all."

"I'll tell you what, Courtney, with all respect to the dead, I think the present man is the best of the two."

"I was fond of poor John," replied the Baronet. "I knew him from a child—and he was steadying down; there was no real harm in him—but for all that I believe you are right, Markham. I'll give my Maud with a safer feeling to Sir Arthur than I would have done to Sir John."

"The king is dead. Long live the king," replied his friend, laughing.

A light step approached over the lawn, and Maud entered through the glass doors singing and smiling. A tall, slender girl, with a pretty, bright face, a perfect figure, and a basket of roses in her hand.

She was faultlessly dressed, every article, from the frills to the shoes being exactly what they ought to be, the very type in their expensive simplicity of dress for a young lady in the country. The hat that dangled from her arm being one of Elise's best, though the material was coarse straw, and the trimming only a bunch of wild roses.

"Look here, Maud," cried her father, laughing. "Markham is afraid you may take a fancy to the curate."

Maud blushed as girls will blush at such remarks, but she laughed a gay, unembarrassed laugh.

"What a shame!" she cried. "You must not laugh at poor Mr. Brown; he is as good as gold."

"You would not like to be poor," said Markham. "What would you do if you were, I wonder?"

"Who would like it?" replied Maud simply, and nodding her little aristocratic head. "It must be dreadful. I can't *think* what people do at all; so debasing to be always considering the prices of things, and higgling and haggling. How can any mind stand it?"

"It is all habit," replied her father; "it has pleased God to put people in different ranks, and when they have all their lives been accustomed to sordid calculations, it may not make their minds as sordid as it seems to us it must do."

"Well, I prefer my own rank," laughed Maud, "and I think it *does!* It can't be good for the mind to darn stockings and to calculate how many weeks a cask of beer, containing—how many gallons was it, papa?—ought to last, as Mrs. James did the last time we called on her."

Sir Hildebrand Courtney looked at his lovely daughter with a happy smile, as secure in her future as in her present, and with a profound certainty that she could never too lightly "lie 'mid the lilies and feed on the roses of life."

"There is something degrading," he said, "for anyone to take upon herself voluntarily, the cares and drudgery of poverty, for those who are placed in that position it is different; and if they make poverty respectable, I respect them. But for those born to higher things, voluntarily to degrade themselves to the meaner side of life, I not only do not respect, but I despise them. I could not forgive a

child of mine who married out of her own rank. She would not only lose my affection and good opinion, but I could not forgive her."

Maud laughed saucily.

"Don't defend yourself before you are attacked, dear papa," she cried, dropping him a little curtsey. "I am just as likely to descend to a lower rank as you are yourself, and not one bit more."

"You hear her; I was not wrong," said Sir Hildebrand, looking significantly at his friend.

II.

Sir Arthur Torrington and Sir Hildebrand Courtney's property adjoined; a very good reason why it had been agreed that it would be a good plan to let them become one, a plan which the present young Baronet was just as eager to agree to, though when first formed he had not been the heir of it, as the elder one could desire.

Life was a beautiful and unexpected dream to the young man just now, even without the love that had sprung up in his heart, and with that love it was ecstacy. Born in very narrow circumstances, and too distant from the title and family estates ever to expect to be their possessor, his early years had been spent in actual poverty. Being well connected, he had obtained a Government clerkship, and his salary obtained for him the necessaries of life though little beyond them. Hundreds, we might almost say thousands of young men are content with this, and if they cannot attain refined pleasures because they are expensive, content themselves with such as are vulgar and cheap. But Arthur Torrington was not such a one. Life as it presented itself to him could by no means satisfy his aspirations. His occupation appeared to him useless, except inasmuch as it provided himself with food and raiment, and though he might double his present means by the time he was fifty years old, there was no prospect in his life, higher or better than to do this by means of sitting at a desk, with a little unimportant business before him which could be executed in half the time allotted for it, during the twenty-five best years of his life.

His nature was a noble one, and he shrank from the monotonous idleness that lay stretched out in weary waste before him. Was an immortal soul sent into the world for nothing better than this? Arthur determined to do something with his life that would make it worth while to have lived it when he came to die. He saved his money, attended divinity classes and prepared himself to take holy orders, determining to become a clergyman, as his father had been before him. He made acquaintance with a clergyman in one of the worst parts of London, and assisted him as a zealous lay-worker in every way in his power. While engaged in work and thoughts such as these, there came to him the news of his cousin's death; and by the death of a man he had never seen, and of whom he had every reason to think ill, earth became all of a sudden bathed in a flood of sunshine.

Through the spring days of that beautiful year he and Maud Courtney were constantly together, for Sir Hildebrand had received him as a neighbour and as the representative of a family who had been for generations allied to the Courtneys by ties of friendship in the kindest manner. Halcyon days glided by that 'mid all the chances and changes of this work-a-day world would never be forgotten; and if, as spring melted into summer, Maud's ringing laugh was perhaps less often heard than of old, a deeper happiness than had ever yet shone there deepened the expression of her brillaint eyes.

It was on an evening all sunshine and beauty that, as they stood together in the rose garden, Arthur asked her to be his wife. It seemed to him a wonderful thing to do, and to do with a well-grounded hope of success. She was gathering roses to place in her vases—fresh, half-opened buds.

"See," she cried, holding a bunch towards him; "they will soon be splendid flowers, but they will bloom just as well in water as out here and will give me a great deal more pleasure."

"They are like girls transferred to new homes," said Arthur, "and you will see how much they gain by the change."

Maud felt a little shy at this speech, and instead of looking at him, kept her eyes fixed on her roses, while the colour she would gladly have subdued, stole gradually over her face till she was as pink as they were. There was a silence then, a happy silence, though neither felt content; Maud would willingly have put back the moment she felt was coming, Arthur longed for it to be over and the prize won. She was the first to speak, compelled, as it were, by necessity to avoid the crisis which, though it would only recross her path, she would have postponed indefinitely had it been possible.

"Shall we not go in?" she said timidly, and turned towards the house as she spoke.

But her words and movements only hastened the inevitable, for it was then that Arthur wooed and then that Maud was won.

It might be a surprise to Maud that such a man should consider her worthy to be his life-companion; it might be a surprise to Arthur that this exquisite treasure had actually become his; but it was no surprise to the watchful father, when his motherless darling came to him, all smiles, blushes and tears, to tell him that the words had been spoken by which her life was no longer his or her own, but must for ever be devoted to another, a stranger who a few weeks ago they had neither of them seen or heard of. Sir Hildebrand's happiness was unalloyed, and he congratulated himself on his own foresight and care which had secured to his daughter a joy not always possible to the high-born, namely, a love-marriage.

"Of course," as he said to himself, "she must have been happy with any good man who was kind to her. I would not have married her to anyone else—not to poor John himself, unless I was convinced

he had sown his wild oats and steadied down—but she is in great luck, for she really likes Sir Arthur."

"Likes" was a mild term when used to describe Maud's feelings for Arthur. The young couple were deeply in love, and life went by them as a holiday. Sir Arthur was rich and generous; not a wish or fancy of his beloved one's need remain unsatisfied. Pendean was newly-furnished to suit her taste; her future carriages and horses were perfect, and the jewels given her by her lover bid fair to rival the handsomest that might appear at the first drawing-room after their marriage, at which the bride was to be presented.

In the midst of all this present happiness and these delightful preparations for the future only one uncomfortable thought occasionally entered the mind of the devoted lover, and that one he admitted to himself was foolish, and that it was ridiculous to allow it in the slightest degree to mar his happiness. Still, even when Maud was most fond and Sir Hildebrand most kind, the skeleton in his closet made itself to be remembered, and so pertinaciously that it at last expressed itself in words, as thoughts will do when they recur so frequently as to become part of our idiosyncracy.

He and Maud were alone in the conservatory, and he had been selecting a flower or two for her to wear in her hair. He looked rather wistfully into her frank, pretty face as he presented them.

"A year ago, Maud," said he, "and I had little enough to do with conservatories; the entrée into them was denied me. Suburban gardens were more in my line."

She laughed gaily.

"Such a shame," she cried; "*isn't* it odd to think of? *You* poor, Arthur? To think of you at a desk, and with only money enough to live on. Was not it wretched? What would you do with such a life now?"

"While I was preparing myself to be a clergyman I was quite contented. I had a noble goal before me."

"Don't talk of being contented before you knew me," replied Maud, with a sweet little pout.

He gave her a tender smile as he replied. "You know what I mean, dear. I could not be content *now* without you, but I had never seen you or heard of your existence even, nor you of mine. And if we *had* met," and now his secret trouble for the first time came to the surface and clothed itself in words, "you would not have given me a thought, and I should not have had a chance of winning you, because I was not Sir Arthur Torrington."

Maud did not recognise this as a trouble at all. She only laughed gaily.

"Yes," she cried, "how strange it all is, we might have met and become acquainted, and never have given each other a thought. It seems so impossible, does it not? And yet it is utterly true."

"And if I had offered to you I should have been the most presumptuous of men."

"Of course you would. Only you couldn't have done it. A clerk in the Woods and Forests—just fancy!"

"So that after all," said Sir Arthur quietly, with a touch of sadness and even of reproach in his manner, "it is my title and property you are marrying and not myself."

Maud looked eagerly into his face, her heart stirred more by something in his voice than by his words.

"But, you know I *care* for you, Arthur," she said softly. "And I could not help the other."

"And why could not you help the other?" persisted he.

"Why, it could not have been; it would not have done; it would have been wrong and also impossible."

"I admit it all," he replied, "it could not have been; it would not have done; it would have been wrong and also impossible, and yet it *hurts* me, Maud."

"Oh, Arthur, I think that is silly. Why should it hurt you? We can't help it. You know I *couldn't* have married a man in that position. Some things *are* impossible, and that is one."

She threw her little head back as she spoke, and stood there looking at him in her proud young beauty. The queen rose in the rose-bud garden of girls, and the most aristocratic of queen roses, so exactly in her proper place in that fine conservatory, surrounded by exotics, splendid leaves and gorgeous flowers, mere symbols of luxury and leisure. How would she have looked in a third-rate London lodging, sitting in a shabby dining-room, while her husband helped her to hashed mutton and lukewarm potatoes? He felt that she would have been entirely out of her element; he acknowledged that it could not have been, and as he did so, shook off the one uncomfortable thought that had now and then, not marred, but perhaps shocked his happiness.

"Yes, you are right," he said. "Some things *are* impossible."

"Noblesse oblige," laughed Maud.

"True," he cried; "one can't define it—one can't set exact limits. Instinct and habit does it all. Noblesse oblige."

That evening, after dinner, it so happened that Sir Hildebrand talked to him about his cousin, the late Sir John, while they drank their claret.

"Poor John," he said. "I was fond of John. I had known him from a baby, and I always maintained there was no real harm in him; but do you know, Arthur, I would rather give my girl to you than to him."

"Thank you," replied his future son-in-law a little dryly; "but there was no thought of giving her to him, I presume."

"Oh yes there was," said Sir Hildebrand calmly; "we always intended it: no marriage could be more suitable; it planned itself, as I may say, and old Sir John and I settled it all."

"And Maud?" asked Sir Arthur as calmly, but it was a calmness that concealed considerable irritation of feeling.

"Oh, she knew nothing about it," said her father easily. "He was a little wild, poor fellow, and she was so very young: they were just good friends, but it would all have come about when he settled down."

"And Maud would have made no objection?"

Sir Hildebrand laughed at this pertinacity about Maud.

"Jealous of a ghost?" cried he. "Of course Maud would have made no objection; but never mind that. Maud's heart is yours now, and she would make pretty strong objection to an emperor, I suspect, if he was anyone but yourself."

"You would never have given Maud to a poor man, Sir Hildebrand."

The other stared at him and then burst out laughing. "Given Maud to a poor man! I should rather think not."

"And yet young couples may be happy though poor," Arthur said dryly.

"Young couples? yes, if it is their portion, no doubt they can. I dare say the coachman and his wife are very happy; but we were speaking of *Maud*."

"I am quite aware of that, Sir Hildebrand, and if *Maud*, of whom we are speaking, had happened to attach herself to a poor man, what then?"

"She could not have done so."

"But if she had?"

"Of course it would have come to nothing, and she would have seen the necessity of its doing so as much as I."

"You see I have been a poor man myself," Arthur said rather sadly, "and it makes me think of these things."

"Well, my dear fellow, rank is rank, and it is not you or I who settled these things. She would have been sorry if she had formed a misplaced attachment and I should have been sorry, but it would *have* to be broken off however sorry we might be—noblesse oblige."

Sir Arthur Torrington started. Here were the same two words with which he had so entirely agreed when they fell from Maud's rosy lips a few hours before. Did they convey the same weight with them now that they were spoken by her father? He reflected a moment, determined to be reasonable and just, and he thought that they did. Then, with a bitterness, for which the next moment he blamed himself, a sudden vision rose before him of his cousin John—not drowned, not dead—but alive and flourishing, his wild oats sown—at least, in Sir Hildebrand's opinion—the lover, nay more, the husband of Maud, and himself a poor clerk or still poorer curate, meeting them accidentally somewhere and being slighted by them both; meeting them, perhaps, at a railway station, where he got out of his inevitable third-class, dirty, draughty compartment, and saw them, in

all the luxuries of fans and hot-water tins, in their equally inevitable first-class carriage; and all this that might have been—must have been—had been changed in one minute by the upsetting of a boat. Sir John had been drowned by the upsetting of a boat on an Australian river, and he was Sir Arthur.

"You never saw Sir John," said Sir Hildebrand; "but I suppose you knew the difference his death would make to you?"

"Not a bit of it. He kept up the quarrel with my branch of the family, and my father was not a man to think or talk about dead men's shoes. He was not one of those men who like to say 'There are only four or five,' as the case may be, 'between me and the baronetcy;' or, 'if such a one were to die, I should be next heir;' and as relations I knew nothing about fell off, I was not aware what it was all coming round to, and when I read the account of Sir John Torrington being drowned, in a little paragraph in the *Times*, I had not a notion of what it was going to do for me."

"I seldom regretted anything more than that little paragraph," said Sir Hildebrand; "how little we know what is before us. I *can't* regret it now," smiling at his future son-in-law; "and yet I was fond of John—poor fellow. Such a fool as he was to go out to Australia and lead a loose sort of a life there, and go out in a boat with a lot of common fellows, not gentlemen even, and then be drowned because he couldn't swim."

"I don't want to say a word against a dead man," remarked Arthur; "but nothing surprises me more than hearing Sir John spoken of with affection. I had fancied him such a very objectionable fellow."

"I was always fond of John," Sir Hildebrand replied shortly, and dropped the subject.

But Arthur Torrington could not make up his mind that his cousin John had been a good fellow, or that any amount of wild oats sown and done with could have made him worthy of Maud's hand.

It was his own earnest determination to be himself worthy of his wife and his position, and in his schemes for their future life he had made plans for the benefit of the poor and uneducated, which at first perhaps a little disquieted Maud, but which she soon became as much interested in as he was. Sir Hildebrand subscribed handsomely to everything that, as Sir Hildebrand, he ought to subscribe to, but beyond such bestowal of superfluous cash he did not take personal interest in the classes beneath him, nor had Maud been brought up to do so, though the loving influence of Arthur's noble nature modelled hers to be all that he could wish.

"You see, darling," he said, "I have a fear of misusing our positions, and am haunted by a sense of its uncertainty."

"Why, what on earth *can* be more certain than our happiness, Arthur?"

"Yes, Maud, *on earth*—but there is such a thing as death, you

know ; in one moment I might lose everything as Sir John did. I owe all I possess to a sudden death, and I owe you, Maud, to that also."

"Well," Maud said, a little pale ; "but only death *can* separate us —and we are young and strong. We are safe in each other—nothing can change us except death."

"Only if I were *not* a baronet and had *not* ten thousand a-year," began he, smiling.

"Yes, but you *are*," she cried impatiently. "And nothing can ever make you anything else. That one thing is certain ; you always, as long as you live, will be a baronet with ten thousand a-year. Don't go on about that *if* any more, please, or I will say if I had been a linendraper's daughter you would never have asked me to marry you."

III.

Two or three weeks more passed away in the most delightful manner. Sir Arthur, strong in the sober certainty of making bliss, began to recognise the rest as well as the joys of his position, and all the sweet certainties that Maud spoke of, and he thankfully acknowledged nothing but death could deprive him of them, and to the young death is indeed a distant prospect.

He had dined at the Priory one night. It had been one of the happiest evenings he had ever spent in his life. There had been music and star-gazing and lovers' talk, and he had been light of heart and in gay spirits when he parted with Maud on the doorsteps and walked home beneath the light of the summer stars.

It was no surprise to either father or daughter the next morning, who were sitting together in the library, when he walked in before luncheon. He was quite in the habit of leaving late one night and appearing early the next morning.

But Maud instantly saw that he did not look like himself.

"You are so pale, Arthur," she said gently ; "are you ill ?"

"I don't know," he replied, looking blankly at her, as if he did not see her.

"Pale," cried Sir John, "why he is the colour of a peony. My dear Arthur, what have you been doing that you blush like a girl ?"

Sir Arthur passed his hand through his hair with an impatient, almost embarrassed movement, very unlike his usual manner.

"I am glad you have come, however," continued Sir Hildebrand. "I have received a sketch of that steam-plough, and I want you to look at it. It is the neatest thing I have seen for a long time."

He gave Arthur a paper as he spoke, who fixed vague, absent eyes on it, and, after a little silence, said "Yes, it is a very good colour."

Maud laughed and Sir Hildebrand said he supposed he was thinking of his last new carriage or the curtains he was putting up in her boudoir.

"This, my dear sir, is a steam-plough. You can judge by this sketch of its shape and symmetry, but in no way of its colour."

Arthur looked up and stared Sir Hildebrand in the face, with an empty look in his eyes; apparently he neither saw what he was looking at nor heard the words that had been addressed to him.

They both asked him if he was ill, but he declared, with some irritation, that he had never been better in his life, and added, in the same breath, that he had a raging headache. Maud anxiously approached him, but the gong sounding caused a distraction, and they all went in to luncheon.

"Take a glass of this claret," said Sir Hildebrand. "It will banish your headache. Poor John got it for me, so it can't help being good."

"Was he such a good judge of wine?" asked Arthur, with an abruptness that made them both look at him.

"None better. And a consumer, too—he was not such an abstemious fellow as you are."

"I was not brought up to it," replied he in a strangely bitter tone, and added suddenly: "How odd it is there is no picture of Sir John at Pendean. What sort of looking man was he, now?"

"Not half so good looking as you are, my dear boy."

"He was rather short and stoutish," said Maud. "And he was dark, quite swarthy, with a hooked nose."

"Rather a peculiar-looking man, in fact?"

"Yes, decidedly." Here they rose from table. "But come into the library, and I will show you his photograph.

Sir Hildebrand good-naturedly let the lovers retire tête-à-tête; and Maud turning over the pages of her album, Arthur stopped her at the right one, recognising his cousin by her description. It was not a pleasant picture, and did not give the idea of a very delightful person, being almost a Jewish physiognomy.

"So that is Sir John Torrington," said Arthur, gazing at it.

"*Was*," corrected Maud. "Poor John! Papa was very fond of him; but he will soon be fonder of you, Arthur."

"Will he?" replied Arthur, with strange emphasis on the words. "What is that outside the window, Maud?"

She turned to the window, but saw nothing; and at the same moment Arthur, keeping his eyes fixed on her, hastily abstracted the photograph from the book, concealed it in his pocket, closed the album and joined her at the window. She quite started when she saw his face—it was so white and ghastly.

"Oh, Arthur!" she cried, frightened. "You must be ill!"

"No, Maud — hush — I am not ill," he replied; "but I have something to tell you: I am going away."

"Going away!"

Sir Hildebrand had entered the room without their perceiving him, and he echoed Maud's words: "Going away, Arthur?"

"I am very sorry," he said, in an odd, embarrassed manner. "I can't help it. I must, for a little while."

Maud was absolutely silent; her father waited, with an air of inquiry, as if for further information; but Arthur offered none, and the silence became rather an awkward one.

"Where are you going?" asked Sir Hildebrand at last: a natural question under the circumstances; but Arthur coloured so deeply that displeasure as well as surprise appeared in Sir Hildebrand's eyes, perceiving which Arthur's colour grew deeper still.

"To London, and then—perhaps ——" He hesitated and stammered under the elder man's gaze. "Perhaps I may have—to—go abroad."

"That is rather a vague phrase, is it not, Arthur?" asked Sir Hildebrand, with a certain significant calmness; and Arthur remaining absolutely silent, Maud regarded him with a sort of dismay.

Sir Hildebrand cleared his throat, and then inquired how long he intended to be away.

"As short a time as possible, you may be sure," was the reply.

"It cannot be a very long one, certainly, as the middle of August is not far off."

"Yes," said Arthur, faintly; and his way of saying this filled both his companions with astonishment, for the middle of August was the time fixed for the wedding to take place. Sir Hildebrand had no doubt that some former scrape had come unexpectedly to the foreground.

"If you have anything to tell me before starting, come into my study. I am quite at your service," he said kindly.

"Not at all, thank you," cried Arthur, rising in embarrassed haste. "I must be off directly."

"Good-bye, Arthur," said Maud softly. He turned to her with eyes full of yearning tenderness.

"Dearest," he began, and then stopped, silenced by an emotion the intensity of which amazed Sir Hildebrand, and strengthened the vague, uncomfortable suspicions already in his mind.

Arthur's eye fell on the clock on the mantel-shelf, and stammering out that he was barely in time for his train, he shook Sir Hildebrand's hand, ending the shake with a grip of the well-shaped white fingers that almost made him cry out with pain. Then he drew Maud into the hall, and embraced her with more tenderness than he had ever shown before.

"Trust me, Maud," he said; "and if troubles overtake us we must try to bear them."

"Oh, Arthur, what troubles can?" cried she wistfully; and so they parted.

When Maud returned to her father, she found him caressing his handsome fingers and almond-shaped nails.

"Oh," she cried, all in tears, "you were not kind to poor Arthur! I am sure you hurt his feelings."

"He had his revenge, then; for I am sure he hurt my feelings. But quietly as you take it, Maud, this is a very strange business. He said nothing more to you in the hall, did he?"

"He told me to trust him, and I shall trust him," replied she proudly, but speaking through tears.

"Oh, he told you to trust him, did he?" said her father; and the fact did not seem to please him one bit.

To Sir Hildebrand's mind this telling Maud to trust him was the worst feature in the case, but to Maud it was the whole world; not that she would have doubted him without the sweet injunction, but now she did more that not doubt, she trusted him implicitly with all her heart during four weeks which, but for that sustaining faith, would have been weary enough, for Arthur remained away for that time and his notes were very angelic in their character, being few and far between. At last Sir Hildebrand received a note from him which, after the customary beginning, ran thus: "I was a fool to go away without telling you that I am not in any scrape and have not done anything wrong. It is nothing of the sort that detains me, on my honour."

Sir Hildebrand drew a long breath as he read these words, and looked up with a smile.

"I never liked a young fellow better, and I am glad he has written this to me," and he read the words aloud; "and now I will stake my honour, too, that his absence is caused by nothing he need be ashamed of."

"Ashamed! Arthur!" cried Maud indignantly. "Oh, papa, how *can* you?"

"Am not I saying that I don't suppose it?" cried he. "I dare say he has gone to help some friend who *is* in a scrape, for he is a generous fellow."

"That is a charming idea," cried Maud, smiling through her tears. "Which you have had from the first, I dare say, and *that* has prevented your fretting."

"No, indeed," replied she simply. "He told me to trust him; so, of course, I left his reason alone and just trusted."

Sir Hildebrand smiled his approval.

"And, by George, I'll trust him, too," cried he; and kissed his daughter in token of the compact.

More than a month had elapsed since Arthur's strange departure, when, rather late on a lovely evening, Maud strolled idly about among her flowers; a quiet hushed joy lay around her, a gentle peace had replaced the triumphant glories of a summer day; the birds were silent, the flowers sleeping, not a breath stirred, and yet a dewy freshness pervaded nature; and a hope reached Maud's heart, which responded to it with a thrill of joy. "I think he will be back soon," she said softly, and even as she uttered the words, a shadow fell across her path and Arthur stood before her.

For one happy moment, happy for both, she was clasped to his heart, and then, leaning away from him to gaze fondly in his face, she was shocked to see how ill and worn he looked; and he had not a smile for her—only a look of deepest love and sorrow in his eyes.

"You are ill, Arthur!" she cried.

"No, Maud, it is not that."

She looked at him with mute enquiry.

"Yes, I have something to tell you. Something that will cause us misery enough—but which is not miserable in itself; and we must remember that, Maud—through all that happens, my darling, we must try to remember that."

"But what can cause misery to us, Arthur, while we love one another?" she said, hardly frightened yet by his words in the joy of his return.

"John is alive," replied Arthur solemnly.

"John!" exclaimed she, bewildered; "*who* is John?"

Arthur was astonished, for to his mind, long brooding on one subject, there seemed to be only one John in the world.

"Sir John Torrington," he replied slowly; "my cousin, Sir John Torrington. He is a living man."

She actually screamed. "Oh, no, no," she cried, putting up her hands as if in self-defence. "He is dead—drowned—he cannot be alive; it would be too cruel—too shocking. Oh, Arthur, Arthur!"

"Hush, dearest," he said earnestly; "do not speak, do not *think* like that. Be silent and hear me; he is not drowned, he is alive; I have seen him, touched him, heard him speak."

"Oh Arthur, Arthur!" And she wrung her hands wildly.

"Dearest Maud, we must not be sorry that he is alive; we must not —remember, we must not—tell yourself that over and over again till you learn it by heart. His life is his, just as our lives are ours—and it has pleased God to give it to him—to rescue him from a death."

"Oh, Arthur, what are we to do? How *could* he?"

Arthur gave a faint, sickly smile at the question.

"Alas!" he cried, "I have got accustomed to the misery of our future lives—to our separation; to you it is sudden and new. Try to bear it, my darling. God knows what I have suffered, but perhaps I may be able to show you the way to bear it, so that it may not be quite so dreadful as alone."

Maud made a wild sign of misery as he uttered the last word, and repeated it in a terrified voice: "Alone!" staring forward as if she saw her future life sketched out before her and could not endure the sight.

"Listen, my darling," continued Arthur with renewed eagerness, "listen; we must not grieve that John is alive—but we must do more, we must rejoice—we must indeed. He was leading a bad life, Maud, he has repented. How can we be sorry that he lived for that? And remember how wicked it would have been to wish him to be drowned when he went out in that boat. We must be glad, Maud."

Maud looked at him. His face was wan and worn, but a noble pirit shone through it. She thought he looked like one of the saints of old days, and that a glory might surround his head, such as in pictures adorns earthly saints.

"O my love," she sighed, "teach me—lead me. I will do, I will eel whatever you wish."

"We must part," he cried. "Do you remember how you thought nothing but death could part us. Ah, my love, our happy talks when we agreed you never could be the wife of a poor man!"

"That *I* could not, Arthur?"

"No, darling; you told me so—and I saw it—not only it could not be, but you could not be happy, if it were."

"Oh, Arthur, do not misjudge me," cried she in great agitation. 'I know it cannot—must not—be, because of my father. But if it could—ah, if it *could*, I should be the happiest creature on earth."

"*You*, my love?"

"Yes, Arthur. I did not know when I said that, it was all theory. I love you; you are good and you love me. As your wife, however poor, I should be happy—*happy!* Ah, yes—and without you——" She burst into a passion of tears and sobs, concealing her face with her two hands, while through her slender fingers the big drops showered down, then hastily looking up at him with wet, flushed cheeks, she cried: "I am not sorry that he is alive, I am *glad*—but, oh, Arthur, what can we do?"

She wept as he had never seen woman weep before, and, turning away, he dashed the tears away from his own eyes.

"God keep us," he said, and then there was silence between them.

"We must go to your father," he cried at last.

She was calmer now. She was exerting all her strength not to give way, trying to control herself, and not add to her lover's distress.

"Yes," she said, speaking with difficulty, "let us go together. Let us do everything together—while we can," and she heaved a panting, trembling sigh.

Sir Hildebrand was sipping his wine alone, and sprang up to receive Arthur with unfeigned delight.

After a hearty shake of the hand, he suddenly perceived what a miserable young couple stood before him and eagerly asked what was the matter. With a weary feeling Arthur knew that he must begin and tell the story of his dethronement over again. It seemed hard that he was doomed always to be the sufferer, and the idea flashed across him with a grim humour that his present experience might add a page to Dante's "Inferno."

Before he could speak, Maud having, with the quick instinct of love, seen that he shrank from the task, spoke for him. "Papa," she said, with the manner of one announcing a death, "John is alive."

"And pray who is John?" replied the Baronet testily.

"Who is John?" cried Arthur, a little bitterly, irritated that the same question should be asked by father and daughter, "why my cousin John, your old friend John, Sir John Torrington, the owner of Pendean."

"Nonsense! He is drowned!"

"He is not drowned. He is alive. He came home with me."

Sir Hildebrand Courtney clasped his hands on the top of his head, and cried out with a wild gesture, "It cannot be!"

He was like a man who had heard of a death, not of a life.

"It is," replied Arthur calmly. "He is young—not so old as I am; his life is before him. He has as good a right to it as I have to mine. We ought to be glad that he has been raised up from the dead."

Maud leant back in a chair, white, as if about to faint, while Sir Hildebrand rallied his scattered senses.

"John is not dead," he murmured. "John is not drowned; and you ——?" He looked strangely at Arthur, and added with a sort of sob, "Ah, my poor fellow."

"It is new to you," said Arthur simply. "I have thought of nothing else night and day since we parted, and it seems to me very old. I go back to what I was." He looked at Maud, and a spasm of grief crossed his face. "I hope to take orders."

Sir Hildebrand groaned. "And we were all so happy," he said. "My poor, poor fellow." Then he begged him to tell him exactly what had happened, to which he listened attentively, as also did Maud, white and motionless in her chair.

"My last happy day," Arthur began, "when I walked home from the Priory, I found a letter from a surgeon, dated C——n, Norway. It told me that an Englishman had been seized with illness there—that he was alone, and in a fever—that he called himself Sir John Torrington, of Pendean, Norfolk, and his name in a book or two and some letters confirmed the statement. He enclosed some notes; one of them was from you, Sir Hildebrand, and contained a message from Maud in it."

"Dear, dear," cried Sir Hildebrand, very much moved. "Poor John; I always *was* fond of poor John."

"And will be again," replied Arthur, a little drily. "Well, I felt a conviction after reading this that my cousin was still alive, and the personal description tallied well with what you gave me a few hours later. Still there was a hope—God forgive me—a chance, that he might be a thief or impostor, a former valet, or something of that sort, and the things fallen into his possession, and I felt that I could only in person satisfy myself as to how the truth lay. The letter was directed simply to the name of Torrington, Pendean, as the doctor did not know who lived there, and he put 'to be opened' in the corner. I could not make up my mind to tell you or Maud

while I was in suspense; I may have been a fool, but some things are impossible, and I simply could not do it."

"So that was what you left us for," said Sir Hildebrand, wonderingly.

"Exactly; there seemed to me nothing else to do. Only I was obliged to do it in silence or I should have been unmanned. Well, I found him very ill, and, with the photograph in my hand by his bedside—did you miss it from the album?—I could not doubt his identity. He was Sir John Torrington, and I—well, just what I was before the dreams of the last few months. I nursed him, the fever was typhus, and people were afraid, so I kept with him day and night; they say I saved his life. He was delirious, and his talk told me much of his past life and the sort of man he is, and when he came to his senses he told me more himself. He had a wild time to look back on I am afraid, and when he found he was supposed to be dead, he half, as it seems for joke, determined to take his fling, and be perdu for a time, amusing himself as he could hardly do under his own name. He is an easy-going, rather reckless sort of fellow, and never thought of consequences; but his amusements ended in his fever, and now he means to lead a new life, or, as he says, to start afresh. And through it all," added Arthur, falling into a monotonous tone of voice as if reciting a lesson, "through it all, he says, he never forgot Maud, but always hoped to renew the old claim and marry her."

"I am very much obliged to him," Sir Hildebrand said dryly.

"I am not," cried Maud, starting to her feet; "I will never marry him; I will never marry at all if I cannot —— Ah, I should be the happiest woman on earth as Arthur's wife, however poor we might be; but I will never be the wife of any other man, since that is impossible."

"And who says it is impossible, pray?" demanded her father.

Arthur and Maud both stared at him in mute amazement.

"Why is it taken for granted that I shall break my word? I believe I am generally supposed to be an honourable man? Arthur, I promised you my daughter, and I think you are the very finest fellow I ever set eyes on. John isn't fit to hold a candle to you. You have lost title and fortune, but you shall have Maud. I promised her to you, and by the Heavens above us I'll keep my word. I don't believe there are two such men in the world as you, and it would be a dirty thing to make that girl faithless because it has pleased Providence to ruin you. You think I'll break my word to Arthur because I am Sir Hildebrand Courtney, of the Priory, but faith, that is the very reason why I'll keep it. Noblesse oblige."

The joy of the lovers may be more easily imagined than described. Astonishment was at first overwhelming, but happiness soon overwhelmed even astonishment, and although Maud's first impression was that every tenet and principle in which she had been educated

was overthrown by permission to become a poor man's wife, yet she recognised that to a Courtney honour must be all in all, and proudly felt that the true nobility and unselfishness of Arthur's nature was what had caused her father to feel that his plighted word held good even under the altered circumstances.

When Sir John himself put in an appearance, the broad, sunburned, rollicking young fellow was certainly not exactly the husband Sir Hildebrand would have selected for Maud. He seemed to think, also, that that young lady was being kept for him, and would pick up the handkerchief whenever it was thrown to her, and was exceedingly irate and injured when he was informed of the true state of affairs. After a good deal of storming, he gave everything up with the easiest good humour, and remarked that never having been to Manitoba, he thought he would take a trip there and leave the property to Arthur. "Because, you see, Maud will then be mistress of Pendean, and that is what the old bird always reckoned on."

Nobody took advantage of the offer, however. Arthur took orders and his marriage had to be put off for about a year, when it took place. Curiously enough he obtained the curacy Mr. Brown held at the beginning of my story, and Maud commenced her married life in that very cottage from which the blue smoke rose so gracefully. From abject poverty she was protected by the handsome fortune Sir Hildebrand gave her, and years afterwards, when she was verily and indeed mistress of Pendean, she would say, with a smile and a sigh, that no period of her life had been more truly happy than the years she had spent in that humble cottage as a curate's wife.

Sir John Torrington was present at his cousin's wedding, and now and again visited Pendean; but most of his time was passed in other lands, a vagabond life being the one most to his taste. There was no harm in the man—as people say he was nobody's enemy but his own—and in the course of his wanderings he often did good and made hearts dance with joy.

When Maud had been married about five years, he came home to die, a neglected cold having settled on his lungs and terminating in rapid decline. The young couple were so thoroughly happy as they were, that his death caused them real regret for his sake, which was not alleviated by any joy on their own; though I do not mean to say that by-and-bye they did not appreciate their changed position, or that Sir Hildebrand did not do so also; though he would often remark, if any allusion was made to the late Baronet: "Poor John! I was always fond of poor John."

# THE BRETONS AT HOME.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "Letters from Majorca," etc. etc.

WE left Quimper with many regrets. The place itself was low and relaxing; the hotels were uncomfortable and badly organized; but there remained the cathedral with all its lovely architecture, its matchless tone and colouring, its singular beauty both internal and outward. There was the wonderful palace and the beautiful garden, with its old-fashioned, sweet-scented flowers; above all, there was the recollection of the Canon and of Adrien; of a voice persuasive in its charm, and of strains of celestial harmony that might have drawn angels down.

Everything haunted us as a dream; an experience that had been almost too good for earth; and so far we felt that our happiest moments in Brittany were over. But everything comes to an end; the "sea change" lies upon all; and we bravely turned our faces to the north.

We left by train, bound for Douarnenez, and all the wild coast of that portion of Finistère, the true "Land's End" of Brittany.

The train passed through the smiling and fertile valley of the Steir, crossing the river several times, and finally reaching the small town of Guengat, which played its part in the historical records of the fifteenth century. It still possesses the small old church with its treasures, including a remarkable Renaissance processional cross, given to it in 1527 by one of the lords of Guengat, who had been master of the ceremonies to Francis I. Of its ancient and remarkable castle nothing remains excepting an old weatherbeaten tower.

Slowly and deliberately, after the custom of all things Breton, the train steamed onwards to Le Juch, a village with a small Gothic church. The country people, rough and primitive, were certainly a hundred years behind the times. Much of the scenery was wild and barren. As we approached Douarnenez, the sea opened up in the distance, whilst far down below us stretched the little harbour, with its multitude of fishing boats. The train stopped on one side the river; the town, on the other, crowned the heights.

The hotel omnibus rattled over the iron bridge, and we looked down into quite immense depths. The situation was exceedingly picturesque, but the town itself possessed no beauty whatever. One felt very out of the world, in a very uncivilized state of existence; the charming gables and latticed panes of some of the old Breton

towns were not to be found here. The houses were all very unromantic, and seemed given up to life's prosy side.

The streets were rather straggling and hilly, and we rattled through them with a great noise. There are two principal streets in Douarnenez, and the remainder of the town consists of small, narrow, unwholesome thoroughfares, more or less a disgrace to the administration. Yet it might be so different, for it possesses many advantages. The Bay of Douarnenez is so fine that every year people come to it in spite of every drawback. The French, less fastidious than the English, will put up with many inconveniences that would be impossible to the latter.

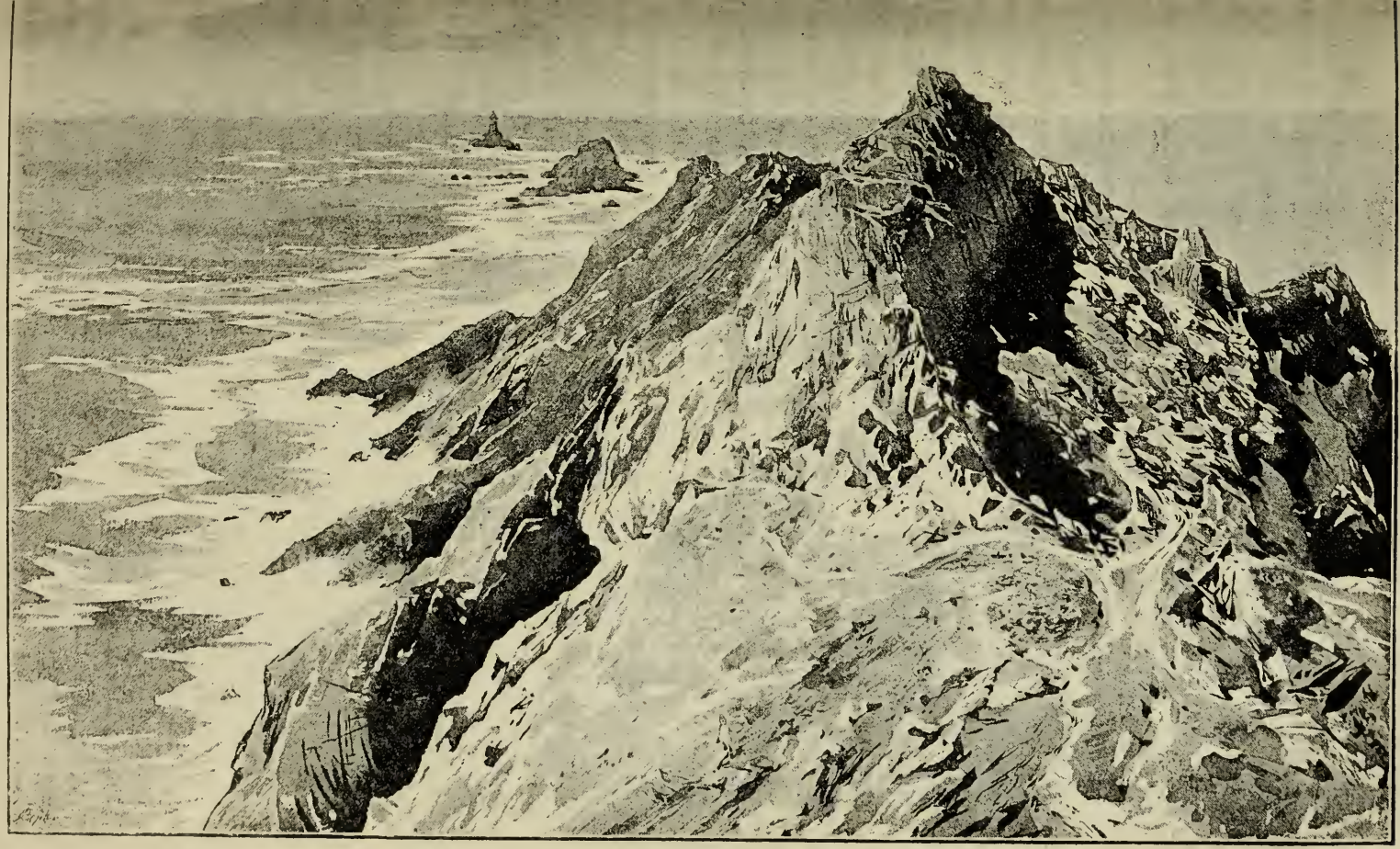
From the heights you look down upon this wonderful bay, the largest on the Breton coast and one of the finest in all France. Before you lies stretched an immense extent of rocky shore. In the distance, round a small island, the restless waves for ever beat and foam. It is called Hermitage Isle, and possibly in days gone by some solitary hermit here lived his isolated life of contemplation. Another small island, the island of Tristan, is crowned by a lighthouse, a warning signal much needed in these dangerous waters.

At your feet lies the small port, its little piers stretching out like arms—a veritable harbour of refuge during the frightful storms that visit this part of Finistère.

Douarnenez is the first and chief sardine port of all France, and its sardines are the most renowned. All its trade, all its prosperity, lies in this. The difference between a good and a bad year means to these inhabitants the difference between comfort and poverty; although like most of the French, the people of Douarnenez possess the great virtue of thrift and are able to live upon almost nothing a year. A people who can make a delicious soup out of pea-shells, and a savoury pot-au-feu out of bread, onions, and a little butter need never be in want of "economies."

They not only fish for sardines, but they salt and tin them when caught, and send them forth all over the world. The fishing season begins on the 20th of June and ends in December. During this time eight hundred boats and four thousand men are employed; and a successful season yields over one hundred millions of these small delicacies. Besides this, two hundred boats and from two thousand five hundred to three thousand men are occupied in fishing for mackerel off the coast of Scotland. In 1883 the value of the sea-harvest amounted to £170,000.

When the boats are in the harbour or the offing, the scene is very gay and lively. The season over, they are all taken up the estuary to sundry land harbours or "dry docks," where for six months in the year they are left in peace. All about the pier and the coast, at certain times, you may observe nets spread out to dry, and men carefully mending them, preparatory to their next voyage. It composes with a strangely picturesque effect; for what can be more



POINTE DU RAZ.

striking than a grouping of sea and boats and white sandy shore, and brown nets over which the weatherbeaten fishermen are stooping and passing their meshes to and fro?

We thought this very forcibly as we gazed upon it from the heights the evening of our arrival. The island of Tristan, crowned by its lighthouse, was a conspicuous object from our vantage point. The word Douarnenez literally means *land of the island*, signifying that the island of Tristan depended upon the mainland for its supplies. The island is so close to the shore that at low water you may almost walk across to it.

During the civil wars of the tenth century Douarnenez was taken by Jacques de Guengat, who was on the side of the King. In 1595 it was recaptured by Fontenelle, and its houses were demolished to fortify the island of Tristan. At that time the island contained nothing but a monastery, of which Fontenelle took possession. Under his rule this former abode of peace became a scene of lawlessness, the home of brigands. For three years, in spite of every effort of the garrison of Brest, he managed to keep the whole neighbourhood in terror, and committed innumerable acts of robbery and violence.

An ancient tradition says that the island received its name from Tristan, one of the Knights of the Round Table, who shared with the beautiful Yseult the "loving cup" that had been destined to King Marc'h. Marc'h (the word is old Breton for horse) had his habitation near the village of Ploumarc'h. Like King Midas, he caused all his barbers to be put to death, in order that they might not betray the fact that he possessed a horse's ears. One of them, however, was spared after having sworn to keep the secret, but the burning desire to disclose it was so strong that he went down to the shore and spoke it aloud to the winds and the waves. Three reeds grew out of the sand, these were cut and turned into musical pipes, and whenever they were blown gave forth the words "Marc'h, King of Ploumarc'h, has the ears of a horse."

At the Hôtel du Commerce we found ourselves far more comfortable than we had been at Quimper. The rooms were bright and airy, and the upper windows looked over the houses of the lower town on to a magnificent view of the harbour and the bay, whose waters lay shimmering in the sunshine. There was a more homely feeling about the inn, and the two women waiting, in white Brittany caps, were interesting and picturesque: thorough types of la Basse Bretagne, who spoke French like the aliens they were.

Douarnenez itself is one of the most remote corners of the Basse Bretagne, and the Breton language is almost universal. In passing through the streets you hear it on all sides. Many of the people are rough and uncivilized; aboriginal in appearance; especially those who inhabit the close, unwholesome quarters of the narrow thoroughfares leading to the port. They are strong and sturdy, able to get through any amount of labour, and endure great hardships

without being much the worse for them; but the type of the race is not to be admired. Large and clumsy limbs, flat faces and high cheek bones, with a small development of brain, such are many of the inhabitants of lower Brittany; the descendants, as Madame Hellard put it, of our Ancient Britons. The question is, why they have stood still through all the centuries, since the tendency of life is upward and progressive.

It is possible that Douarnenez itself possessed some beauty of its own in its early days, before Fontenelle, robbing Peter to pay Paul, demolished its houses to fortify the island of Tristan, on which he had established himself at the head of an army of brigands. Like its inhabitants, it was rebuilt on very clumsy lines, which remain to this day. The street in which our inn was situated was a wider thoroughfare than most, and much of it was modern. Passing the hotel and continuing your way up the hill you presently reach the village of Plouaré, which possesses a rather remarkable church in the form of a Latin cross, with Flamboyant windows. The tower is a fine example of the fifteenth century, somewhat richly decorated, and crowned by a spire pierced with small open-work roses, surrounded by small turrets. The west doorway is adorned by sculptured boats and fishes, commemorating the fact that the church was for the most part built by the shipwrights of Douarnenez.

In the town itself there is nothing to keep you. Its surroundings are depressing, and you are only anxious to escape from them.

Therefore, it fell out that early the next morning we started very willingly for a long drive to Audierne and the Pointe du Raz, and all the rocky coast which is so typical of the north of Finistère, and has gained for it so sad a renown.

As we passed through the town the curious people came to their doors and windows to see who travelled so early. Crossing the railway, we entered a very charming and smiling valley, which presently brought us to the quaint village of Comfort, where the landscape began to be wild and barren. Near here we found a tumulus, adorned with a menhir or dolmen, those strange Druidical remains (if Druidical they are) that are to be found in many parts of Brittany. Here also were the remains of an ancient camp. The chapel, dating from the sixteenth century, possesses three naves and an interesting open tower. We also saw in the choir one of those "wheels of fortune," of which so few now exist. They consisted of a wheel of wood, hung round with small silver bells; and the wheel, turned by the sacristan at certain fixed periods of the service, gave forth its musical chimes. The cemetery also contained a menhir, and a Calvary recently restored.

After this came Pontcroix, the chief town of the district: small, ancient, primitive, out of the world, quaint and picturesque, more or less uncivilized. We were glad that our visit was only a flying one. It is built upon the Goayen or River of Audierne,

which is sufficiently wide to give passage to the larger fishing vessels of the fleet of Douarnenez : a fact adding much to the general effect of the scene.

It chanced to be market day, and a sort of horse fair seemed to be going on, which made it difficult to pass through the streets. This gave rise to many a passage at arms between the horse dealers and our driver, the latter an excellent coachman, but small, red-headed, hot-tempered, who took fire at the slightest provocation, and came down upon his offenders with showers of abuse. Fortunately, it was in Breton, and therefore unintelligible to us ; but if sounds mean anything, abuse in the Breton language must have great powers of annihilation.

The church of Pontcroix is remarkable and interesting. It dates from the fifteenth century, but a good deal of it is Roman. The richly-decorated tower is crowned by an equally beautiful spire. The south porch is profusely sculptured. It is dedicated to Notre Dame de Roscudon, and the Breton natives call it Ilis-ar-Verc'hez, the Church of the Virgin. The neighbourhood contains many villages, with small ancient churches that are well worth visiting.

Outside the south porch of Notre Dame a group of curious old women, presiding at stalls and dressed in quaint costume, had faces like withered apples, and small beady eyes, dimmed with age. We spoke to them in French, but they replied in Breton, and evidently signified that French was to them a sealed book. They held up their tempting wares to H. C.—a necklace of blue beads and a ring that was never made for a fairy finger ; but there was no Mademoiselle Ponpon here to fall in love with him, and the poor withered old women did not seem to excite even his compassion.

At this point the road became more interesting : undulating, almost hilly, and bordering the river. On the right the slopes were well wooded, and the trees waved and rustled pleasantly in the wind. Boats were slowly passing to and fro upon the water. Our excitable coachman, who seemed anxious to show off his powers and secure our good opinion, spurred on his horses and cracked his whip, and flew up and down the hills at a royal pace. We passed through several villages, with their ancient churches, and now and then a ruined castle, to add to the romance of the scene. Next we approached the sea, and had distant views of bays and rocks, and occasionally saw a solitary menhir standing upright in all the mystery of its unknown origin. Again, the country grew wild and barren, full of a desolation that was so much in keeping with the dangerous coast and turbulent sea on which it looks for ever. It seemed abandoned by man, forsaken by heaven, for ever mourning for the sad scenes of wreck and ruin that are of such frequent occurrence in these rock-strewn waters.

Finally, passing the ruins of an old castle, of which the Gothic doorway remains, surmounted by a shield, we descended to the level

of the Goayen, and almost before we had time to admire the magnificent view, found ourselves in Audierne, at the very doors of the quaint and primitive inn. Here we were to change vehicle, horses and driver, to continue our journey to the Pointe du Raz, our own driver awaiting our return to take us back to Douarnenez.

It is a small town, this Audierne, equally given up to the sardine fishery, to which it owes most of its present humble prosperity. In days gone by, the days of the sixteenth century, it was rich and flourishing. One solitary house of that date still remains, the only vestige of its antiquity. Its prosperity was due to the cod fishery, which brought in large revenues. But suddenly the cod deserted the waters, and the trade was ruined.

FISHING FLEET, DOUARNENEZ, DRYING THEIR NETS.

It is now a small place, consisting chiefly of one long street, more open in situation than Douarnenez, and more striking. Douarnenez lies on the summit of the cliffs; Audierne is on the level of the sea, which stretches out in magnificent extent. The bay of Audierne rivals that of Douarnenez, whilst its rocky coast and headlands make it more solitary and sublime.

The pier of Audierne is substantially built of stone and stretches far out into the sea. In rough weather the water breaks over it with tremendous force and with a noise of thunder. The spray seems to reach the clouds in showers of foam. From the extreme end the view is indescribably splendid. You seem surrounded by this rock-bound coast, and its points stretch out to sea like cruel arms waiting to hold in the grasp of death all those who venture within their reach.

The fishing fleet of Audierne numbers only some seventy or eighty vessels. Some of them were moored to the side of the pier

on the day of our visit, and others were out upon the water. A few fishwomen were going to and fro with baskets upon their heads; women strong and sturdy, and almost as weatherbeaten as their husbands and brothers, who toil for their lives, and depend upon the "caller herrin" for their daily bread.

We felt very much at the world's end, and it is certainly one of the most remote points within reach of civilization. The strange tongue of the Basse Bretagne heard everywhere around added to one's feeling of isolation. The few inhabitants we met looked at us as if strangers amongst them were rare as angels' visits. The people of the inn were civil and obliging, the inn itself was quaint and old-fashioned. Madame Batifoulier, the landlady, a substantial Bretonne, went about like a veritable châtelaine, dangling a large bunch of keys. Like Mrs. Gummidge, she was a lone, lorn widow, but unlike that celebrated lady, she was not at all low-spirited and inconsolable. Her better half had departed this life a victim to size and weight. He was supposed to have been the largest and heaviest man in Brittany—or out of it, some said. Her son and daughter-in-law now helped to keep the inn, which, though homely and primitive, was clean and comfortable. It stood at the very commencement of the pier, and from its windows we looked out upon the picturesque harbour and the boats; we could trace down the whole extent of the jetty and watch the restless sea beyond.

The inn was undergoing a process of cleaning, and a stalwart Breton maiden, in very short petticoats, but, en revanche, a very tall cap, was splashing about with a pail and a *dulle*, mutely begging our pardon with pathetic eyes whenever she approached too closely to our august presences.

In one corner of the room stood an old-fashioned cupboard of carved wood: genuine Breton work bearing date 1642. It quite adorned the room, and H. C. immediately thought it would do to add to his antiquities. Madame Batifoulier saw him admiring it, first in one light, then in another; now at a distance of a few yards, now a few feet. She came forward, dangling her keys and looking imposing.

"C'est beau," she said. The words were few, but you may put a whole world of expression in a tone.

"A fine example of Breton work," returned H. C.; "and really very genuine."

"Genuine enough," said Madame. "Why it has been an heirloom of the Batifouliers for two hundred years—has never moved out of the house. My husband had many an offer for it, but it would have broken his heart to part with it. He died of the heart as it was; grew so stout that at last it had no room to do its work."

"Would *you* part with it?" asked H. C. hastily, who feared that the topic of the departed host might be uncomfortably prolonged.

"Dame, oui, I think I might be tempted," said Madame. "Times have changed; they are not what they were. The fishing does not

always flourish, and our people have not always money to spend. My son takes after me more than after his father. I do not care particularly for antiquities, neither does Monsieur Ernest. We agreed only a week ago that we would sell, if we could get our price for it."

"It is tempting," remarked H. C. "I have a small collection of genuine antiquities at home, to which I like to add when the occasion offers. Amongst them is an old statue—quite a work of art—also Breton work of the fifteenth century. It has lost its head, but that is a mere trifle. I have labelled it 'Marie Antoinette after execution.' It is quite a success, and raises people's sympathy. No one ever remarks upon the slight discrepancy in the time—for I need not tell you that Marie Antoinette did not flourish in the middle ages."

At this moment Madame's daughter-in-law appeared, announcing luncheon.

AUDIERNE.

"I have had it laid in another room, where you may déjeuner in peace," said Madame. "You have the time to reflect upon the cupboard between now and your return from the Pointe du Raz."

And with an imposing step and a great jingling of keys, she led the way to a small, comfortable inner room, where a table, spread with a snow-white cloth, was ornamented with some old Breton silver. Here she served us with a modest but well-dressed repast. The French are born cooks, and at the extreme ends of civilization you need not be surprised if you light upon a *cordon bleu*. To please his palate is one of the objects of a Frenchman's existence; dinner is as much an institution and necessity of the country as the standing army or the National Debt, and they are artists in this department by inheritance.

Everything was charming and primitive. Madame's daughter-in-law waited upon us; the husband had gone off to Quimper upon business, and would not be back until late at night. We looked out upon the pier and the boats, and listened to all the conversation

that went on in the Breton tongue; fishing women, with baskets on their heads and arms a-kimbo, screaming out their patois to the men on board. Whether they were striking bargains, or merely exchanging "greetings in the market-place," we knew not. The women espied us, came up to the open window, and offered us of their wares. We might have had any amount of fish for a few halfpence, but Madame Batifoulier, in laughing reproof, asked them if they were dreaming: gentlemen *en voyage* did not travel about with a supply of fish to add to their impedimenta.

Nothing certainly could have exceeded the freshness of her own lobsters, which we were at that moment attacking, and which abound at Audierne. The lobster-pots bring them in great hauls in the season.

The women answered in French—a French very mixed and primitive. Their accent in Brittany is often as foreign and atrocious as that of an ordinary English person, and in their genders they are quite as much at sea. Finally they went off, these women, laughing and talking at the tops of their shrill voices, their sabots clattering as they walked, awaking the echoes of the little square at the side of the inn, disappearing up a narrow thoroughfare to their own homes.

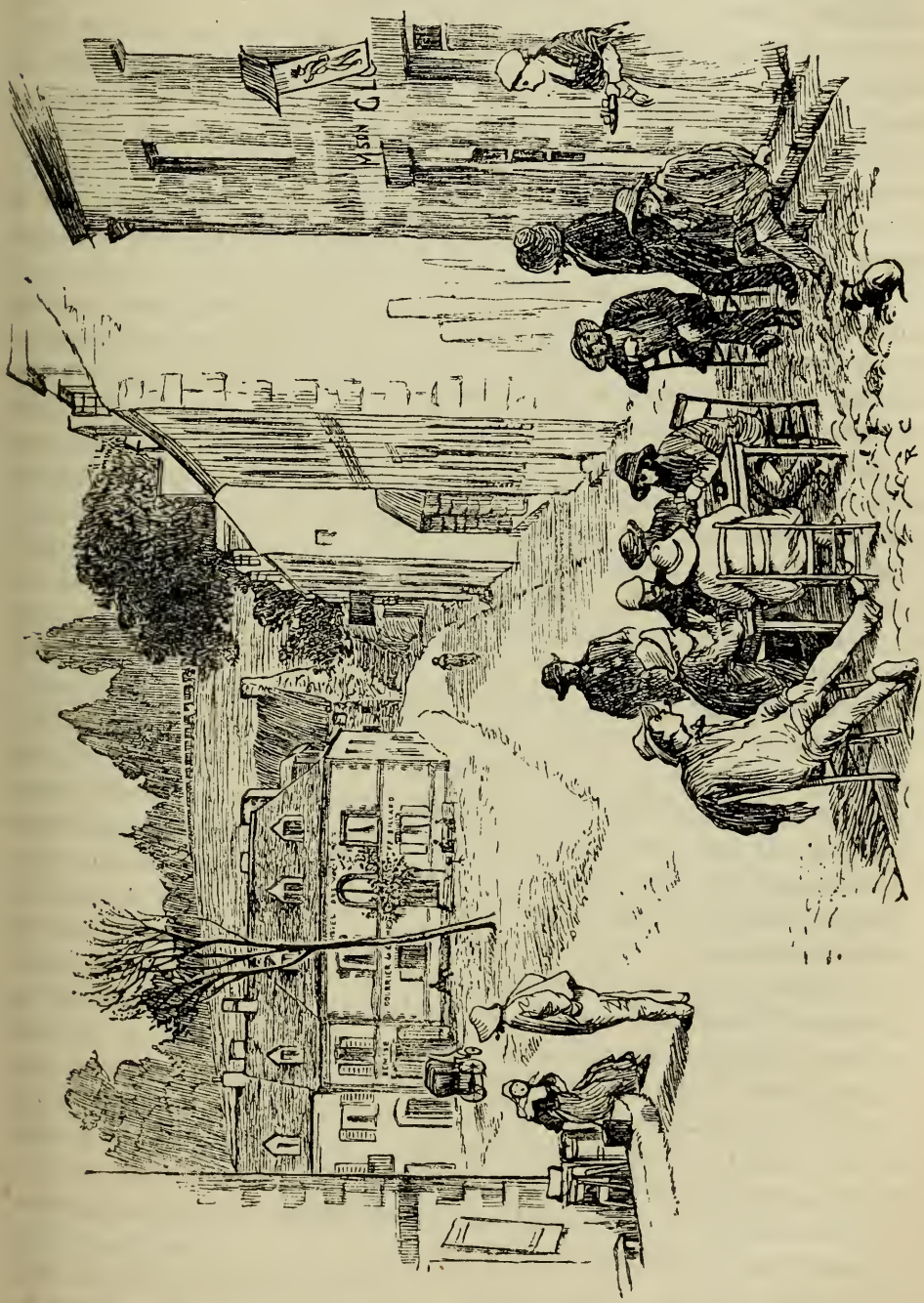
We also soon set out upon our journey. The trap that was to take us to the Pointe du Raz was as primitive as everything else about Audierne; the driver was tall, dark, stern-looking, with very little of the Breton type about him, though he spoke the language. He afterwards told us that he originally came from St. Malo.

Turning to the left, we ascended to a bare plain, where neither tree nor shrub seemed to have grown since the foundation of the world. On the left we came to the small village of Esquibien, with its church dedicated to St. Tugean, a hermit of renown. A statue is erected to his memory, and in the church, amongst the treasures, may be seen a pointed key, that is said to have belonged to him. It is preserved in a wonderful reliquary of enamel. On the day of the Pardon, or village fête, it is brought out, and an innumerable quantity of small loaves or rolls are pricked with it. The bread is said never to grow stale or mouldy, and the smallest crumb thrown at a mad dog will put it to flight. Some of the hermit's teeth are also religiously preserved in the treasure-house, mounted on enamel, and the application of these to the most violent toothache will instantly cure it. The church itself is interesting, partly Gothic, partly Renaissance, and belongs to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Primelin, where the hermit lived, we also passed on the left, the driver pointing out a small dolmen, close to a windmill, beneath which is a long large stone, on which people attacked by a fever lie down, and are immediately restored to health.

After this, the way grew very desolate. We had long said good-bye to hedges, and small dry walls intersected the land like a chess-

board. Notning is more sad and dreary than these dry walls, wherever you meet with them, though they never fail to give to the landscape a certain tone and character which is distinctly artistic as well as depressing.



After the Fair.

At Plogoff, another village on the outskirts of civilization, some eventeen hundred people manage to live out their simple lives. ives yet often marked by the great tragedies of this rocky coast, for he men are chiefly fishermen, and many a craft puts out to sea to eturn no more. One day all is happiness and contentment, a

humble peace and plenty; the next the wives are widows and the children are fatherless. The churchyard contains many a sad record under the mournful *Ci Git:* many an epitaph telling of brave lives cut short and bodies that lie fathoms deep, never to be disturbed until that day when the sea gives up its dead.

The church is an interesting example of the sixteenth century, though its transept contains some Roman capitals. It is dedicated to St. Ké, or Collédoc, who was Bishop of Cambria in the sixth century, and left his see to become a hermit. His life is mixed up with that of King Arthur of the Round Table, who was killed in 1542, at the battle of Camlan, in trying to suppress the revolt of his nephew, Mordrec. His death was avenged by Lancelot, who slew Mordrec with his own hand. St. Collédoc hastened to Queen Guinevère (Genièvre, as the French more happily call her), and persuaded her to refuse the advances of Lancelot, and dedicate the rest of her life to Heaven, declaring that no one could be a worthy successor to King Arthur.

Lescoff, the next village, is the very end of the Breton world. Here wildness and sterility reign supreme, and even thistles and the rankest weeds refuse to grow. Everywhere are traces of ruined walls, and in the far-gone ages it seems probable that some important town flourished here. Immediately beyond this we reached the lighthouse, which marked the Pointe du Raz and the end of our journey.

Yet more grand and sublime, more wild and desolate was this view of the rocks and the sea. Before us stretched the magnificent extent of water, far as the eye could reach. Huge rocks rose up, like fragments of ruined castles, at the very feet of the lighthouse. For twenty miles seaward they rear their hydra heads, and even on a calm day the sea for ever breaks and foams about them. In the furious gales that rage upon this coast the scene is as indescribable as it is terrific. Through some of these gales no craft could live. The waves run mountains high, and over rocks and lighthouse they dash and break and roar, until the hearts of the very keepers themselves quake and tremble with fear, and the small bell of the village church may be heard summoning the inhabitants to pray for those in peril. Many a brave vessel has gone down upon these rocks, within a few feet of land, within sight of a helpless multitude of human beings, and of the crews not one has survived to tell the tale.

But to-day the sea was comparatively calm, though presently, when we climbed to the very end of the huge rocks, we could scarcely hear ourselves speak. Round about us the gulls were clamouring and clanging with wild and plaintive cry. Cormorants took strong wing across the waters, and the herons rose up from some invisible point and took their majestic flight to distant headlands. The sea surged about the rocks far down below us, and boomed and broke about the caves and crevices; striking with a sound of thunder and

ling back upon itself in showers of swirl and spray. On either nd we traced the broken and barren coast. It swept round in ys and headlands: point stretching beyond point; taking all sorts fantastic forms and devices. At the extreme end on one side re the points of Pont l'Abbé and Penmarc'h. Several vessels ssed near us and exchanged signals with the lighthouse on their y to Quimper.

A little to the north was the Baie des Trépassés, that terrible shore h its subtle quicksands where many a horse and its rider are said have been engulphed. The bay is so called from a celtic tradition the effect that the Druids were here placed on board vessels after ith and conveyed to the Island of Sein to be buried; that shipwreck en took place before they reached the island and thus the bodies nd only a watery grave. The Breton legends have it that the ls of these graveless Druids wander about the bay, weeping and enting, whilst the bones of the skeletons, not lying in consecrated und, knock constantly at the doors of the fishermen's huts nanding righteous burial.

The Pointe du Raz is not at all unlike the Land's End of Corn-l, to which it corresponds. The rocks stretch out from the land in much the same form. But they are larger than those of our glish coast; the shore is of wider extent; the coast is more gerous; the storms that visit Finistère are far more terrible.

About six miles out to sea lies the Isle de Sein, to which we e referred. The passage between it and the land is extremely gerous from the hidden rocks and a strong current that runs ween the cape and the island. At best it must only be attempted n the weather is thoroughly settled. The wind often suddenly s here and the sea runs high, and the passage becomes impossible the small fishing boats which take you across. Of larger vessels e are few in this far-away corner of the earth. The people them-es have a saying to the effect that "Never man traversed the without fear or harm"—one or the other: and the Breton fisher-, before putting out to sea, offers up this prayer: "Oh, God, help o cross the Raz, for my boat is small and the sea is great."

is a small island, this Isle de Sein, absolutely bare of all vegeta-, little more than a rock, not two miles in extent, scarcely half ile wide. Yet nearly one thousand inhabitants here find their e, who live chiefly upon the fish that are caught in the waters, especially upon the large conger eels that abound. It possesses nall church and a lighthouse. In the storms of winter the sea ks over the island, and the people have to close their doors and lows against the inroad.

his island was the *Sena* of Pomponius Mela, who lived in the century. It is supposed to have been, as we have said, the l place of the ancient Druids, and in the days of Pomponius essed a celebrated Oracle, of which nine priestesses, vowed to

celibacy, were the interpreters ; something after the manner of the Vestal Virgins of Rome, who kept up the sacred fires in the temple. In time the priestesses died, and the Oracle ceased, and in their place uprose a school of philosophers. The inhabitants of the island were surnamed *les diables*, on account of their barbarous cruelty towards all those who were wrecked upon their shore. Of ancient monuments, testifying to these bygone days and people, very few remain, excepting a few menhirs and dolmens, and some curiously formed rocks, that seemed to have been placed there by the hand of man.

To-day we had neither time nor inclination to visit the historical little island. With the help of a powerful glass we saw as much as we thought necessary, and for legends and descriptions we trusted to the lighthouse-keepers. These men were full of stories of good and evil influences, of terrible shipwrecks and disasters, and of wonderful escapes. Of the strange apparition which they called the Spirit of the Storm, an immense female form, with long hair flying and long fingers pointed portentously ; a form half spirit, half vapour, as it seemed, which hovered over many a shipwreck, and guided the vessel to its doom. For they are superstitious, these Bretons, and somewhat imaginative ; and it is said that many of our own tales and traditions first came from Brittany.

We had scrambled over the rocks at the foot of the lighthouse, and made their circuit, accompanied by a guide : rocks that towered out of the water like gigantic ruined fortresses. It was a wild, awe-inspiring scene. We gazed into immense depths. Every now and then we had so little foothold that we had to be piloted round by the guide. The sea swirled and broke and boomed below us ; one false step, and we should have gone down for ever. A boy, who insisted on accompanying us, climbed about like a cat, and pulled us weeds and wild flowers from impossible places, making our blood run cold as we looked. From one almost inaccessible crevice he brought us a beautiful sample of the Asplenium Marinum, immediately carrying us back in thought to St. Mary's and the Scilly Islands, where, years ago, we had gathered our last specimen. We found these rocks most emphatically the home of the wild bird. Hundreds of gulls were flying about, disturbed by our intrusion. Their sad, shrill cry mingled with the sound of the sea ; almost one might have fancied them the disembodied spirits that haunt the Baie des Trépassés, seeking for burial. They were restless in their flight, many of them being the large black-backed gull which we had chiefly found in the remote Islands of Shetland ; spots as wild, as desolate, as little visited by man as the rocks of this Pointe du Raz.

The sea to-day reflected all the blue and the sunshine of the sky. It was solitude without desolation. We felt that we could have stayed here for weeks, with no other companionship than this grandeur and sublimity of nature : this immense expanse of

, and sky, and rock-bound coast: these clanging gulls that shed and wheeled in the sunlight, their cry filling the air and ding an echo in every crevice. If I dwell a moment longer than ed be upon these scenes, it is that they possess an undying charm d influence; that there is nothing like them in all nature. They scenes where familiarity breeds no contempt, custom can never le; but day by day, and year by year, if you live amongst them, ey grow more beautiful and sublime, and become necessary to ur existence. Without them for any length of time, that terrible ease, the mal-du-pays, will claim you for its victim.

Next to the lighthouse, in a small white house, dwelt a little old man, who was a very interesting specimen of her race, and sold otographs. She spoke French, though Breton was her native

BRETON MENHIRS.

gue, and she assured us that all the days of her life she had never en so far as Quimper. She believed there was a wide world tside, but she knew nothing about it. She had heard of kings and laces, the song of the nightingale and the flash of jewels. All this s as a sealed book to her. She had never entered a train, never en a steam engine. The most wonderful thing in creation to her s the mechanism at the top of the lighthouse, and the most entful day of her life was the day of her marriage. She had once ed three years on the Isle de Sein with her husband, who was a herman, but she never grew accustomed to the place. She did not e the people, and she felt cut off from the world—her own little rld of Lescoff, where she was born and all her people had lived. was only the people who were born on the Isle de Sein who could e and be happy there. Everyone else was an alien. She cried nost every night from sheer mal de cœur, until at last her husband omised to return to the mainland. So one fine day, to her great

joy, they embarked in their little boat, and she turned her back upon the island for ever. Nothing made her more happy now than to look at it and feel that she no longer dwelt upon that miserable, abandoned bit of rock.

She was a delightful old woman, though her education had been very much neglected. She could neither read nor write, but she was thankful to say that she had never felt the want of either. In selling her photographs she had hard work to reckon up the sum total, even with the help of her fingers; the thumbs, she declared, always confused her. We had great difficulty in preventing her from cheating herself. Seven times over she made her reckoning, and seven times over the amount varied. The one little room in which she lived was the pink of perfection, of neatness and cleanliness; her cap was white as snow; and the black shawl she wore over her shoulders was put on quite artistically. She was the very embodiment of tranquillity and contentment. "Our means are small," she said, "but our wants are few. We have always a crust and an onion for the *pot-au-feu*, and the sea is our common property, and seldom fails to supply us with food. For rough days and wintry weather we have our dried fish. Our saddest times are when our husbands and brothers are out at sea and a storm arises, and we hear the little church bell summoning us to pray for those in danger. Alas! even with every precaution, wreckage and death and misery come amongst us, and our hearts grow sad as our own grey skies."

Like so many of these people, she would have gone on talking for hours; and we, if we only had had time, would have been quite willing to listen. For they are often interesting, quaint and original in their remarks. They see life from a very primitive and unsophisticated point of view; whilst their faith and trust and contentment read one many a homely but true lesson.

The good woman was superstitious like the rest of her race. She firmly believed that the spirits in pain wandered about the Baie des Trépassés. She had never actually heard them, certainly had never seen them—it was very few who had the power of doing that; but on many a stormy night she had lain awake listening to the wind and the air had seemed full of wild and despairing shrieks and moans, such as could only proceed from spirits doomed to wander. There were those who declared these sounds to be nothing but the cries of the seagulls disturbed in their nests by the violence of the storm; but some people disputed that the world was round and the sun shone at midday. For her part she believed everything: all the legends of the country, all the miracles of the Church, all the wonders worked by the pilgrim shrines.

Finally we left her, counting her money and declaring that we were honest gentlemen, and she felt sure we had paid her too much. Our dark and stern charioteer was waiting for us, and we set out on the return journey.

We passed over the stretches of barren moor, where neither tree nor flower had ever grown; skirted the quiet villages, where closed doors and windows seemed to say that the inhabitants were all at sea, or were taking rest by day in order to toil by night. Our clatter was unheeded; we created no sensation. Certainly our mode of travelling was primitive enough to have suited the remote ages, whilst our shandaradan might have graced the Ark. Our stern driver unbent a little as we approached Audierne.

"I am originally from St. Malo," he said, "and my parents were from Rouen. I am a true Norman, and no Breton blood runs in my veins, though I can speak the Breton tongue with the best of them. I have almost forgotten ma belle Normandie. For five and twenty years I have been living at Audierne. I used to go out fishing until one cold winter I was laid up with a bad chest and the doctor said another winter's work would kill me. So I had to give it up and take to driving, and I have now done this journey to and fro for nearly twenty years. I know every stick and stone of the road, every blade of grass. Many a change have I seen, many a leaf fall, many a life expire. I think it is about time I went back to my own country; but I haven't saved a sou, and I suppose I shall die here as I have lived here; it does not much matter. I haven't a soul left in the old place that belongs to me, whilst here I have two wives in the churchyard and a third at home, who is a shrew. Ah! if she were only in the churchyard too! That third venture of mine was an unlucky one, but I tell her that one of these days I shall be even with her. If my little plan doesn't tame her, nothing will. Here we are at Audierne, and there stands Madame Batifoulier at her window, rattling that everlasting bunch of keys. We call her Madame Barbe Bleu about here. A brave woman, is la patrone, and as honest as the day. Allons, Joujou!" to his horse; "here we are again, and I only wish my home was as quiet as yours, my good animal. I have two animals to manage, and you are by far the best of the two. Bonjour, messieurs, and merci bien!" as we placed a substantial pourboire in his hand; "a few more such travellers as yourselves and my little plan will ripen. Then we shall see who will dance at the Pardon —she or I. Votre serviteur, Madame Batifoulier," he called out as the landlady appeared in the doorway, filling it up with her ample presence. "The sea was very calm to-day at la Pointe, but she was like a shrewish woman, Madame; it was a case of reculer pour mieux sauter; we may be sure there is a tempest brewing."

He departed, apostrophising his horse and cracking his whip, and we followed our hostess into her inner room, where she gave us some excellent café noir, best of stimulants after our late exertions. A few more boats had come into the harbour with a supply of fish, and we began to think Audierne very pretty and picturesque, though so out of the world.

"Have you decided upon the old cupboard?" asked Madame,

who evidently had been born with *l'esprit du commerce*, as she herself put it, when we complimented her upon her administrative powers.

"Dame," she remarked, "il faut avoir l'esprit du commerce, Monsieur, in this small place, if we are to make both ends meet. Fortunately the hotel is our own and we have no rent to pay, or I don't know where we should be. It has been in the family of the Batifouliers for two hundred years, and has seen a good many generations come and go. I don't complain; we are in very comfortable circumstances, but it is the result of the past, not of the present. To-day we work more for occupation than profit. And the cupboard?"

"I have not thought about it," replied H. C. "The interest of the drive took up my whole time and attention. I am really so encumbered with old curiosities ——"

"It does not matter," interrupted Madame. "It has stood there for pretty well two hundred years; it can stand there a little longer. If you care to have it you can write to me. I will have it carefully packed and sent to any part of the world you please. My husband had frequent offers for it when he was alive, as I have told you, but he would never sell it. Now that the dear good man is g e, we can do as we like. I can see no charm in antiquities. I ways say, when a boat gets too old for work chop it up for firewood; don't put it into a museum. Those everlasting museums of stuffed birds, that stare at you out of glassy eyes until you shiver and think them alive; and wonderful old chairs and models that wouldn't fetch five sous in the market place. More café, messieurs? No? Well, then, I see your driver has everything in readiness, and the horses are a little impatient. Jean, le cocher, who drove you to the Pointe du Raz, would say they were like womankind, very contrary. If you wish them to stand still, they want to be off; and once on the road, you have to use the whip to make them keep the pace."

Once more we set out. The horses after their long rest were fresh and frisky, our driver was the very opposite of the dark, stern-looking Jean who had taken us to the Pointe du Raz and admitte us to his domestic confidences. This present man was many years ger; was small and red-haired, as we have observed, had a say to everyone he met on the road, and altogether seemed to m ife a very happy and enjoyable matter. His name was Pierre, but he said people quite as often called him Pol. It could not have been from any religious motive, for we soon found that he thoroughly understood how to make the most of his worldly opportunities at the expense of no matter whom. A Breton born, he was sharper and more cunning than the generality of his race; a hundred years in advance of his time. However, he was an excellent coachman, and drove like Jehu, and to him we owed one of our most charming experiences in Brittany.

We passed every familiar object on our way back to Douarnenez.

At Pontcroix, the market and the horsefair were over. Many of the buyers and sellers were regaling themselves outside the cafés in the little market place, lounging on chairs and benches, calling for beer or coffee. Our driver seemed sorely tempted to stop his horses and join the convivial assembly; he looked round appealingly at us, and in tones into which he knew how to throw the utmost depth of feeling, exclaimed: "Ah! qu'ils sont heureux! Qu'il est bon de vivre!"

But meeting with no encouragement, he whipped up his horses, as if to put distance between himself and temptation, and went on his way. Nor would time have admitted of any lingering. We had had a long day of it; the sun was declining, the shadows lengthening, and table d'hôte awaited us at the end of our journey. In due time we entered the quiet valley outside the old town, passed over the railway and mounted the steep ascent. The horses clattered through the narrow streets and finally landed us at the inn. Madame came forward: monsieur, as far as we could make out, was generally superintending in the kitchen.

"Had we enjoyed our day? Had the cocher conducted us well?"

Yes, emphatically, to both questions.

"A la bonne heure. Had we seen Madame Batifoulier and her ...ich of keys, and eaten of her lobsters—cette brave dame?"

Again the answer was in the affirmative.

"And the Pointe du Raz—was it not magnificent with all that wonderful rocky coast and expanse of water. But winter was the time for seeing it. If we watched a real storm from the Pointe, assisted at a wreckage, and perhaps saw the bodies of the drowned hurled on shore by the cruel waves, as she had once done—ah, ...oyez-vous, it was an impression that remained for life, and was ...lways coming back in one's dreams. She engaged us to come once ...n the winter, and even to put up at the lighthouse, if we could be ...comfortable, and, tôt ou tard, we should see the most sublime spectacle ...nature could offer us."

We did not doubt it, but felt it to be one of those spectacles we ...should have to leave to the imagination. A winter's drive to the Pointe du Raz and a lodging in the lighthouse could not be thought ...of without a certain blood-curdling sensation which no doubt was ...only a foretaste of the reality.

So we at once negatived the suggestion and turned to a pleasanter ...prospect—the good things of the table that madame so liberally ...provided for her guests, and to which, thanks to our late exertions, ...even H. C.'s poetical temperament was able to do more than ...ustice.

# MY ALBUM.

My Album? bless you! yes, 'tis here;
The dear old book has been on duty
As peep-show, gratis, many a year,
And somewhat tarnished is its beauty.
But, never mind: the old walls yet
Are hung with cherished loving faces;
Some plain enough, and homely set,
While some outshine the old Greek Graces.

Who's this of leoline grand head,
You ask? A splendid man—Dick Seton.
From year to year, with ease he led
Above us all who were at Eton.
Warm-hearted, true and shining face;
And oh! his wit! such brilliant flashes!
But now he's gone, and none his place
Shall ever fill—peace to his ashes!

His death? He fell in battle grim,
All haloed with the hero's glory;
The cannon's full, loud-throated hymn
In thunder closing his life's story.
. . . . In happy days he won the heart
Of this sweet girl: she's dead, of sorrow;
And now they're sleeping far apart,
But joy will come with God's sweet morrow!

And this is charming Lady May,
Of face and form divinely moulded.
Oh! how she waltzed, the alluring fay!
'Twas heaven when her one's arms enfolded!
And when she sang, in sweetest rills
The strains flowed, all the soul entrancing;
Whilst, through the mazes of quadrilles
To watch her gliding—heavens! what dancing!

'Twas vain on her our hearts we set;
Her low, sweet laugh, her looks so tender,
And oh! that killing minuet
Quite captivated Lord Fitz-Splendour.
Her subtle charms and lovely face
Won him, good-natured, loud and mighty.
Now she's My Lady, of the Chase,
And still as fair as Aphrodite.

And here is Dorothy Delane—
Could sculpture, paint, and write love sonne
At home with Balzac and Montaigne,
As well's the newest things in bonnets;
Could quote a line from Swift or Pope,
To give brave wings to her sweet answers,
And fill you with strange magic hope,
As with her you sped through the Lancers.

And Cupid's sharp delightful darts
She'd fire, with low, delicious laughter,
And recked not that in stricken hearts
They'd rankle half a lifetime after.
But, midst her joys fell Fortune's breeze,
Though Nemesis did not forsake her,
She drifted long on life's high seas,
Then entered harbour with a Quaker!

. . . . But needless to go o'er each tale
Of light or shade, in love's strange wooing.
I do not care to lift the veil
On shattered hopes, all faith undoing;
Of meek souls who have passed away,
When loyal, loving hearts would win them,
Dropt at the threshold of life's day,
With all their heavenly music in them.

ALEXANDER LAMONT.

# TOM'S LUCK.

By C. N. Carvalho.

I COULD never make out why my old schoolfellow, Tom Drysdale, was so unlucky. If any other boy at Kingswood fell into a crape, the chances were he fell out of it undetected, but that never appened to Tom. If he used a crib, if he came in late or ran out f bounds, some one was sure to hear of it; an inquiry was made, and 'om, who would have died sooner than tell a falsehood, had to give vidence against himself.

In consequence of this he was constantly in the black book, lthough he behaved no worse than other boys.

At his lessons Tom worked steadily, but the result was small; he ever gained a prize though often very near to it; something always ıppened to diminish the number of his marks; and once, when we ere all sure Tom would be first in French, the unlucky chap caught ıe measles and could not attend the examination.

The same sort of thing followed him through life. His father, a ıuntry doctor with a small practice, had a large family and could do ıthing for his eldest son. Tom tried for two or three scholarships, ıt invariably came out just below the pass men—not such a bad ace as far as learning was concerned, but utterly useless from a ecuniary point of view. On his leaving school, his uncle, Mr. homas Drysdale, took him into his counting-house as a clerk, and as e old man was a bachelor and well off, this was thought to be a od thing for Tom. But he had scarcely been there six months when r. Drysdale married a young widow with a couple of children, and t only did he have three boys of his own in less than three years—o of them being twins—but he showed so much favour to his p-son that Tom soon saw there was no chance of advancement for n. Some real or fancied slight caused him to throw up his situa-n, and then his real troubles began.

First of all he went into the shipping business, and in a year lost he had; then he tried various agencies, but they all failed; and ldenly he gave up business and took a place as under master at old school. There he settled down, to our surprise, for we knew . Battersby had only offered his former pupil the post out of arity, and that the pay was very small, and we could not make out y Tom did not seek for something more lucrative. However, ıe rolled on, and he remained at Kingswood school, always at rk, always cheerful—but very shabby.

In our school days Mr. Battersby had several children, and these, ı natural consequence, were now men and women, or nearly so. Stephen Battersby, the eldest son, my chum of old, had taken a

good degree at Cambridge, and was now assisting his father in the school. Willie, the second one, had passed the Civil Service examination, and was out in India. There were two or three girls, all growing up, and a jolly little fellow called Bob, the baby of former times, who was in the schoolroom. He, if one might judge by his juvenile predilection for preaching, was destined for the church.

I was always on very friendly terms with the Battersbys, and kept up the acquaintance after leaving school. Perhaps the bright eyes of Laura Battersby—my wife now—had something to do with that, but I was much attached to Stephen, and fond of his father, too, in a way.

On my return from a long sojourn on the Continent, I was invited to one of the breaking-up parties they usually gave just before the midsummer holidays. I arrived late, and had to wait till the prize-giving was over before speaking to my friends. The room was full, and, taking the only seat that was vacant, I found myself among the under-masters, and, as it chanced, next to Tom Drysdale.

He seemed little changed; in fact, he was but an enlarged edition of the Tom of ten years back, minus the round jacket. He must have been now about five or six and twenty, but hardly looked that age; he was very fair, with light hair and a fresh complexion.

I had never seen Mrs. Drysdale, Tom's mother, but I felt certain her son was the image of her. He had in some measure improved; there was an air of confidence about him now that he had sadly wanted before. I asked him several questions as to how he was getting on—Tom was one of those people of whom you feel you can ask anything—and he shyly confessed to me there was no improvement in his prospects.

Later in the evening a little play was acted by the schoolboys, in which Tom took a part, and, during the performance, the secret of my young friend's staunch adherence to his post was revealed to me. In the row of benches furthest from the stage sat Mr. Battersby's second daughter, Emily, a girl some years younger than Laura. She fancied herself quite unobserved, but I remarked that she never took her eyes from Tom. His part in the play was a very unimportant one, and no one else appeared to notice him. When it was over I saw him join her, and sit at her side during the rest of the performance. It was all clear to me. I wondered if the girl's parents knew of the attachment, and if it would come to anything. I thought not. Tom's ill-luck was proverbial: he would never win the girl he loved.

But I was wrong. A few years later, when Laura and I, now an old married couple, were stationed up country in the north of India, she received one day a letter from her mother, telling her of the engagement of her sister Emily to Mr. Thomas Drysdale. I scarcely recognised Tom under this ceremonious title; certainly I had never heard him so designated before.

"You always said he was fond of Emily," my wife exclaimed when she had somewhat recovered from her surprise; "for my part, I never thought there was anything in it."

Laura had not seen the tender look in her sister's eyes whenever they rested on her lover, as I had done. She had someone else to think of, I suppose; and then, some people never notice things of that kind.

"But how will it work, Laura?" I asked. "Tom Drysdale is a very good fellow, but he never succeeds in anything. He has nothing on which to support a wife and family."

"It will work well enough, my dear," replied Laura, in a matronly tone; "because my sister Emily is cut out for a poor man's wife. She is not like me at all. She would be miserable out here with a dozen servants to wait on her. With everything to do for herself and her husband, she will be as happy as the day is long. But I had better read the rest of the letter and see what my mother thinks of it."

The rest of the letter brought very bad news. Mr. Battersby, it seemed, was much displeased with his daughter. He had found out the engagement by chance—it had been going on a long time, but the young people, happy in each other's society, had kept silence, hoping for better times. A slight disagreement between Mr. Battersby and young Drysdale had ended in a serious quarrel; the under master received notice to quit, and then came the crash. Emily was in tears, Tom in despair, and all was confessed. In a burst of anger, Mr. Battersby declared nothing would ever make him consent to the match, and if his daughter married Thomas Drysdale he would never speak to her again. Emily, with more firmness than anyone thought her capable of, clung to her lover and refused to break her engagement at her father's bidding. Mrs. Battersby was sadly distressed and knew not which side to take; and here the letter came to an end. How it would all turn out, no one could foresee.

Moving as we did from one part of the country to another, frequent communication with our family in England was impossible, and Emily and Tom were married some months before we heard of it. It was done without the parents' knowledge, and this fresh act of disobedience made Mr. Battersby more irate than before. In the course of the following year Laura received a long letter from Emily, entreating her sister not to throw her off as the rest of her family had done, and imploring her to use all her influence to induce her father to forgive her, if only so far as to allow her mother to come and see her. Poor Laura was much affected at this appeal, the more so as the time Emily mentioned was past now and nothing could be done. We both wrote immediately explaining the delay, and I enclosed something to Tom that I knew would be useful; for, though Emily made no complaint of poverty, I put two and two together and read

between the lines. Tom, his wife wrote, had taken to literature. He would work hard, I believed; but what would he make by it? She spoke, too, of his having law copying to do, and that did not look as if he were successful as an author, and then of his advertising for pupils. It was a sad story. I did my best to comfort my wife, but it was difficult to say anything really consoling.

We did not hear of the young couple again for many months. They never answered our letters, and Mrs. Battersby rarely mentioned them, although Laura asked continually for news of her sister. We hoped to get tidings of them through Willie, who had been home on leave, but on his return to India he was appointed to a post in the Madras Presidency, and we did not meet. And in reply to our inquiries, he only said that Emily had made a fool of herself and must take the consequences. That was possibly true, but scarcely kind, and the words made my poor Laura weep bitterly.

When, at the close of the Afghan war, I was sent home invalided, Laura made me promise to look up Emily the very first thing, but this did not prove an easy task. Her parents had lost sight of her, and we could learn nothing from them. Indeed, we were afraid to ask much, for Laura had a lurking dread that her father would be angry if she spoke of Emily, and perhaps quarrel with her, too. I did not fear this, and, indeed, I saw no anger in the old man's face when at length I introduced the subject. There was a tender longing for his child, which he tried to hide under a cold exterior, that was very pathetic—at least that was what I read there. Laura would have it it was indifference, and she should know her father better than I.

We did not relax our endeavours to find out where Emily was living, but it was only by chance that we discovered it. A private in my regiment, James Sutton by name, had fallen in battle. He had saved my life in the earlier part of the same day by a truly gallant action, and as he lay wounded to death I promised him, that if I lived to reach England, I would seek out his mother and give her the last news of her son.

I had some difficulty in finding Mrs. Sutton's residence, for the direction given me was not very accurate, and my knowledge of the poorer quarters of London is very limited; but I succeeded at length and went through a trying interview. I fear I made it as short as I could. When I rose to come away, the poor mother, longing for further details, followed me to the door, talking all the time. "I shall never forget your kindness, Major Carrington," she said, as she held the door open for me.

A moment later the words "Major Carrington" were repeated in a voice that was familiar to me.

I turned hastily and saw a woman standing on the staircase—a glance told me it was Emily. She ran towards me, and I had to catch her in my arms to prevent her from fainting on the floor. Mr

Sutton brought a glass of water, and in a few minutes the poor girl revived and opened her eyes. "Oh, John, I never thought to see you again," she gasped, and then she became incoherent, and I could not make out her words. The joy of seeing a friend's face was more than she could bear; she was evidently in a very weak state.

After awhile she revived, and then told me a piteous tale. Why repeat it? It is common enough; the struggle of an honest man to make a living with every circumstance against him.

Poor Tom! he had made a good fight as long as his health held out, but when sickness came he had to give it up. He had had a long attack, brought on by a variety of causes, Emily said, but it was subdued now, and with care, the doctor thought he might recover. With care, proper food, pure air and rest. "But what a mockery such a prescription is," she added bitterly; "every single item is an impossibility."

I did not know what to say to my poor sister-in-law; her words were only too true. Still I hoped to do something, only Tom, in his poverty, seemed to have developed a very inconvenient amount of pride, which would render it difficult to assist him. I felt now why it was they had ceased to write to us—that unlucky bank-note I had enclosed, welcome as it must have been, had caused their silence.

I asked to see Tom, and after a few minutes spent in preparing the invalid for a sudden meeting with an old friend, Emily led me upstairs.

Their room was a poor place, many degrees shabbier than the one occupied by young Sutton's mother; the floor was uncarpeted, there was only a common deal table, piled with books and papers, and two or three cane chairs. In a corner was a low iron bedstead, evidently borrowed from the adjoining bedroom to serve as a couch, on which Tom was lying, propped up with a hassock and a small pillow. On the walls were a number of unframed water-colour sketches, some of which I recognised as Laura's work; and, lying about, were two or three pretty trifles—wedding presents presumably, a contrast to the poverty of their surroundings.

Tom was genuinely glad to see me, and overjoyed to learn that Laura was eager to find her sister. He held out his thin white hand to me, but I was almost afraid to take it lest I should crush it. I sat down by his side and tried to say a few hopeful words, and to amuse him by relating the incidents of our voyage, for Emily warned me not to let him talk of anything exciting. She disappeared into the bedroom, and presently returned with a baby boy in her arms. The little fellow was a curious caricature of his father with Emily's large dark eyes. He looked healthy enough, and I suspect Emily stinted herself to supply his wants. It was very touching to see the young parents' pride in their child. Her mother had once offered to take the boy, Emily said, but at the time they would not give him up—though now ——.

I did not stay there long. I got away on the double plea that agitation was bad for Tom, and that I was in haste to take the good news to Laura.

The truth was the whole scene was too much for me, soldier as I was. First, the interview with my poor friend's mother, and then the shock of finding my wife's sister in this sad plight, affected my nerves, weakened as they were by my wounds and by a long residence in a trying climate. When I reached home there were a hundred things that Laura wanted to know, and I could not tell her.

"I never asked sensible questions," she said reproachfully, "and as to supposing she could possibly wait till the next day to see her sister, I didn't know her if I imagined for a moment she would do anything of the kind."

I had to use an amount of marital authority to which my dear Laura was totally unaccustomed, to restrain her from rushing off at once. It was a part of London to which I dared not allow her to go alone, and I was unequal to any more exertion. I had a racking headache, and was obliged to lie down for the remainder of the day.

When Laura saw I was really ill, she said no more; she knew that darkness and silence were the only remedies of any avail in such attacks as mine, so she left me in peace, but was far too excited to remain idle. I heard her go out after our dinner hour, but I knew she never deliberately opposed my wishes, so, though it was an unusual time for her to take a drive without me, I did not torment myself with the thought that she had taken her own way—still I was curious. When she returned, she confessed to me she had gone in the brougham to Bayswater to call on Tom's uncle, whose private address she had found in the directory.

"If I waited till I had seen Emily," she pleaded, "she would have forbidden my seeking him, I know, but I am not going to have my sister and her child sacrificed to Tom Drysdale's ridiculous pride. I knew you would not object. I did not ask the uncle for anything," she went on; "I just informed him of the state in which you found his nephew, so that he should not be able to say he knew nothing of it. And I didn't say my father would do nothing, for I believe he will, John——" and here Laura broke down.

I gathered that her interview with old Mr. Drysdale had been rather a stormy one. It seemed she had inconsequently taken him to task for neglect that had been no fault of his, and that had, not unnaturally, put him out of temper. I do not think my little wife had spoken very gently, and what the old uncle's feelings towards his nephew were, she had, in her excitement, failed to discover.

But when we went to Mile End the next morning we found Mr. Drysdale already there. He was an odd little man, with light grey, kindly eyes, and very white hair; not a bit like Tom, except in an innocent way he had of looking up at you as if he were sure you understood him and would sympathise—which is more common in

dogs than in human beings. He had been much annoyed, he owned, by Laura's assumption that he had treated Tom with coldness and neglect, but a night's rest had chased away the feeling and he was really grateful for the information she had given him.

"I never knew such a woman for going straight to the point, sir," he said to me as we waited below in Mrs. Sutton's little parlour while Laura went up to her sister. "By Jove, how she pitched into me. Told me I'd neglected my duty, and a dozen other unpalatable truths. And she was right, sir, in the main, I confess, but it was want of thought, Major Carrington; want of thought, and not deliberate unkindness. But Tom was very much in fault. When he left me in a huff because he saw no chance of becoming a partner in my house, I told him he was a fool for his pains—and I think so still. I said to him then that I was not going to turn away my brother's son, and if he ever repented of his foolish haste and wished to come back to me, his seat was there; and so it is. I could do no more, although your wife thinks otherwise. I spoke to Tom about this to-day, and we agreed he should come back to me as soon as he was strong enough. And though I cannot promise him a partnership—no man can with three sons growing up—I can give him a very good berth, for the boys, bless them, are babies yet, and I am getting old and shall want some one to take the reins long before my eldest son is ready for them. And as for Gerald, whom Tom thought had taken his place, he is mad to be an artist, and as his father left him a pot of money, why, I see no objection to it, or else I have no great opinion of that business as a money-making concern—anyhow, he is out of Tom's way. It makes one's heart sink to see how thin and white the poor fellow is, and how he tries to smile and has no strength to speak. Will he ever, do you think, get well? To-morrow we will take him down to my little box at Sevenoaks with his wife and child; that will give him a chance, the doctor says. I think if he had to stay here, in this half-starved condition, another month would see the last of him."

And the little, tender-hearted old gentleman dashed his hand across his eyes.

We were interrupted here by the entrance of Mrs. Battersby, to whom my practical Laura had telegraphed on the previous day and who had come up by the first train, anxious to see her daughter. I went upstairs to tell Emily of her mother's arrival, and then the two sisters came down together, bringing the baby with them; they said nothing of it to Tom, judging that he had already had sufficient excitement for the day. Mr. Battersby would have accompanied his wife, but she persuaded him to wait a few days, as Laura's telegram said Tom was so very weak. He had quite forgiven the young pair, he told me, and would be only too glad to receive Emily and her husband. He sent a message to say Tom was welcome to his former post if nothing better offered, but, though the salary was as much as

he could afford to pay, it was, he knew, a very poor pittance for a married man with a family.

Poor Tom, he was too weak to be consulted on any of these points. Whether he would live or die was the question of the hour. It was truly pleasant to see his friends vying with each other in their efforts to be of use to him.

Tom grew strong in time, and, at last, his luck seems to have turned. He is doing famously in his uncle's office, and has developed such a talent for business that the old gentleman declares, sons or no sons, he shall be taken into partnership. Tom takes his good fortune very calmly, and, whenever the old days become the topic of conversation, his invariable answer is: "It is a long tide that has no turning." Perhaps he scarcely realises how very nearly his own tide had ebbed out for ever.

## A HARVEST PICTURE.

RUTH, midst my gleaners the sweetest of sweet,
With your brown hands and face, and your dainty white feet;
To my mind the picture would be more complete,
If I only might venture to woo you.

But then your proud eyes would flash scornfully bright,
Your cheeks would turn pale (quite a pitiful sight),
While you'd start from my path like a fawn in a fright—
But what if I whisper "I love you?"

Ah! then, gleaning Ruth, you might tremble and flush,
And lower your sun-bonnet to hide the sweet blush.
Supposing I try it?
"Ruth, darling—"
"Sir, hush!"
"Nay, I won't—for I honour and love you."

A. E. G.

# HIS FIRST ATTEMPT.

By Jessie Leete.

## I.

IN an out-of-the-way corner of a London ball-room two men had sought temporary refuge from the tide of fashionable frivolity which surged around them. The elder was a large-limbed, rugged-featured man of nearly forty, with the keen blue-grey eyes and reddish hair which mark one type of the canny north-country man. The other was a handsome young man, not yet thirty, with the good-natured, lazily, nonchalent air of the genuine London man about town. The two men had met for the first time a quarter of an hour ago, but they were now chatting pleasantly and freely together. Some chance remark of the younger man, Howard Barrington, presently led Mr. Alexander Carr to hazard an interrogative assertion.

"You are not a married man, I see?"

"Indeed, no! Cold mutton and washing-day bliss has no special attraction for me, I confess. Life is a fairly jolly sort of thing for a bachelor, but I doubt it's being worth living if taken so much au grand sérieux as matrimony implies. Of course, I speak as a poor man," added Mr. Barrington, in an explanatory tone. "If I could count thousands where I count hundreds, I might perhaps be able to afford even so extravagant a luxury as a wife. As things are, it is an open secret that I mean to marry—when the evil day at last overtakes me—for money. Forty to fifty thousand is my figure—exact amount to be adjusted to a sliding-scale of youth and good looks—not to mention good temper—in the lady who is to buy the honour of owning me."

"Not a very lofty view of matrimony," observed the elder man, with a rather grave smile.

"Possibly not; but it is the view shown me by common-sense. I have enough of my own to keep a good coat on my back now and to provide a decent cigar for myself and a friend; but suppose I were seized with the insane desire to pay some girl's dressmaker's bills, how far would my little income go then? Besides, think of how much I should have to give up! Friends—a woman always hates her husband to have any friends but herself—liberty, amusement, leisure, independence! Why, what has a man left when he has tied himself to a woman's apron-string?"

"He has at any rate a home, and someone in it whose interests are identical with his own."

"Not a high enough bid, my dear sir! The fetters will need to be more thickly-gilded before I consent to shackle my free limbs

with them. Sold I shall ultimately be, no doubt—but it will be with my eyes wide open—to see the price of my freedom told down in good coin of the realm before I sign away my freedom for ever and a day."

"These are your London ideas of life, I suppose," said his companion a little stiffly. "In the North we are still old-fashioned enough to retain some of the antiquated belief in domestic happiness."

Just then a son of the house came up to hunt the idlers out of their cosy corner, and they were carried forth, helplessly submissive, to add yet two more couples to the already crowded floor.

Mr. Alexander Carr was the only son and heir of a wealthy Scotch manufacturer, who, some years before his death, had disposed of his business to a "Limited Company," and retired with the spoils into the ease of private life. But the son had inherited too much of his father's talent for commercial enterprise to pass his life in contented idleness, and was already becoming known as one of the successful financiers of the day. He and his young sister Pleasance had lately taken a small house in Mayfair, and were just beginning to form a circle of acquaintances in London.

Of quite another type was Howard Barrington. A Londoner by birth, a solicitor by profession, a "man-about-town" by choice, a "good fellow" by wide reputation, he had, as yet, never done a serious day's work in his life, and had he depended for his living upon his profession, would have been indeed in evil case. Yet his accomplishments were many and varied. He was a crack billiard and tennis player, and a capital shot; as a stage manager he was in great request; he could conjure almost well enough to earn his daily bread by that art; could sing a tenor song as well as many a concert singer; and could keep a room convulsed by his serio-comic recitations. A pleasant life on the whole, though scarcely reaching the heroic height, and distinctly wanting in the element of perpetuity.

Mr. Carr, himself a serious and somewhat taciturn man, was curiously attracted by the brilliant young fellow, who never felt it beneath his dignity to be amusing. An odd sort of friendship sprang up between them, and before long, Mr. Carr requested his sister to take an early opportunity of including Mr. Barrington in one of their modest dinner parties. Pleasance had till then never chanced to meet her brother's new acquaintance.

"I am sure you act admirably, Miss Carr."

"I have never yet made the slightest attempt in that direction."

Mr. Barrington was seated beside his young hostess at the dinner table. At first sight, Pleasance Carr might be described as just a pretty north-country lassie, with the proverbial yellow locks and accompanying blue eyes. It was only after a while that you saw the eyes were shaded by long black lashes, which deepened their colour

almost to violet, and noticed the delicate dark eyebrows which lent a distinctive character to the face.

"Then you must really allow me to have the honour and pleasure of calling forth your latent histrionic talent," answered the guest, with a very creditable imitation of eagerness. "I am getting up some private theatricals just now, for the benefit of the schools at—'pon my word, I don't quite know where they are!—but they are in some slum, *somewhere*. And of course, you know, the poor little beggars must be taught their catechism and so on, or how are they ever to be content with the—decidedly unpleasant—state to which they are called? You will help me, won't you? One never pleads the cause of charity with a lady in vain."

"If anyone will give me the training I shall need, it will give me pleasure to be of use in so good a cause."

Not one of the usual depreciatory excuses, no mention even of a cold, not a single engagement pleaded!—did ever a girl show herself more wanting in the art "de se faire valoir?"

Howard Barrington was almost taken aback for once; the ground seemed cut from under his feet. He was so accustomed to meeting graceful diffidence with delicate flattery, and gradually diminishing insuperable difficulties by well-turned compliments, that for a minute he felt quite unfairly treated—defrauded of a subject of conversation which, neatly handled, would have lasted nearly the whole dinner-time. He felt just a shade afraid of this quietly outspoken young girl, but the sensation was a novel one, and not wholly unpleasant.

And before the numerous rehearsals for the play in question were over, Mr. Barrington had learnt that Pleasance Carr was, in many other matters, the exact opposite of most of the young ladies with whom he had been used to dance, gossip and flirt. In all her ways and words, a gentle and modest reserve was blended with perfectly frank and innocent confidence—a mixture which Mr. Barrington found piquantly fresh. The task of drilling her in her rôle soon became a real labour of love; he had never before had a pupil so quick to respond to every suggestion, so accurately conscious of her own powers and limitations, or so genuinely grateful for the pains he bestowed. Inch by inch she, all unconsciously, drove him from his stronghold of habitual indifference, till he woke one morning to find himself actually counting the hours which must elapse before he should see her again. After that, the citadel speedily surrendered at discretion. When at length the evening of the play arrived, and Mr. Barrington pleaded with Pleasance Carr, in his rôle of lover, for some sign of her favour, there was a ring of sincerity in his voice, a depth of expression in his face, which awoke the plaudits of the audience, and caused the heroine's cheek to burn and her tones to falter, as she took up her cue and meekly confessed her love. She dared not meet his glance; but the trembling of the hand he was privileged by

his part to hold, caused the once hardened heart of the boastful bachelor to beat a double-quick march of hope and joy.

Now, had the course of Mr. Barrington's love run smoothly, why should its story be written? Nothing so uninteresting as your level turnpike road, with never an obstacle to surmount, or a danger to be encountered. Even Love himself seems actually to prefer the winding mountain-path, with all its difficulties and dangers, its precipices and yawning chasms, for he rarely chooses the straight and smooth road to the goal.

In this particular case, the circumstances which prevented any wearisome monotony in the path of Mr. Barrington's wooing was the habit into which he had fallen of openly posing as a fortune hunter, and on all occasions proclaiming his distaste for "domestic happiness."

Unfortunately for him, Mr. Alexander Carr was a man who took life very seriously, and accepted whatever was said to him au pied de la lettre. Tell him you were dying of cold (when you felt a little chilly) and he would immediately ring for someone to fetch the doctor. So when Howard Barrington declared that nothing but poverty would ever induce him to commit the social suicide of matrimony, and that, nevertheless, he was willing to wed the ugliest woman in England, were she but properly gilded, and much more such nonsense, Mr. Carr had listened quietly, and thought that he was getting a curious glimpse into the real sentiments of the modern young man.

Coupled with this inability to detect jest from earnest, was an obstinate adherence to his own opinions, when once formed. He decidedly liked Mr. Barrington, but in the recesses of his own orderly mind, he had labelled his new acquaintance like a museum specimen: "Howard Barrington, an agreeable companion; gifted with considerable talent; but mercenary, and ill-fitted for domestic life." And the label once affixed, the matter was dismissed as finally settled.

The softest spot in Mr. Carr's nature was his deep and unselfish devotion to his young and only sister, Pleasance. The world could scarcely have produced the man whom he would have considered quite worthy of her love; and her insensibility to the advances of all previous suitors had confirmed him in the belief that she herself would be equally hard to please.

When, therefore, Mr. Barrington one day suddenly presented himself in the character of a suitor for his sister's hand, a very decided feeling of anger mingled with the wealthy financier's surprise and dismay. So it was his pretty Pleasance, his cherished darling, whom Mr. Barrington had fixed upon as his prey! It was she who was to supply this idle young fellow with the means of leading a luxurious existence, while her warm womanly nature pined in sadness for lack of affection and of the home-joys for which she

was so well fitted! But he was a quiet and cautious man, and his reply was calm and courteous, though absolutely decided.

"No," he said, after a minute's pause, "no; I cannot give my consent to your addressing my sister. You are not the man to make her happy."

"But why not, Mr. Carr? I would do everything in my power to do so, and I cannot help hoping that she cares something for me already."

"You have spoken to her about it, then?"

"Well—yes. But she would only say that she could give me no answer till I had spoken to you. She would scarcely have said that, however, had she meant to refuse me. And, surely, if we love one another, that is the best starting-point for happiness?"

"With some men, yes; but not with you. You have said in my hearing a dozen times that domestic happiness would never be sufficient for you, and no doubt you are right. But Pleasance is not a girl to be satisfied with a 'society' life, or a society husband; and I cannot see her happiness trifled away by a man who by his own confession is a fortune-hunter."

"A fortune-hunter! If any man dares——" began Mr. Barrington impetuously, but the financier gently interrupted him.

"You cannot be offended at my recalling what you have so frequently yourself asserted. My sister is not a very great heiress, it is true, but her fortune exceeds the amount you have named as an essential in any marriage into which you might enter. You are not, perhaps, to blame for desiring a rich wife, but my little Pleasance must not be sacrificed to such a marriage as you comtemplate."

Howard Barrington was pale with anger and mortification.

"I wish she had not a shilling in the world!" he exclaimed passionately.

But neither pleading nor protest could stir his adversary one inch from the position he had taken up. In vain he "eat his own words," and revoked a hundred thoughtless assertions. He was on the horns of a dilemma. Either he had meant what he said, or he had wilfully asserted what he did not really believe: and either seemed almost equally bad in Mr. Carr's matter-of-fact eyes.

"Don't press me any further, there's a good fellow," said the elder man at last. "I tell you plainly and finally, it can't be, and I know that Pleasance will trust my judgment in the matter. I don't want to quarrel with you at all. Of course, you can't come to the house for the present, but I shall see you elsewhere, and we can still be friends. You will soon get over this unlucky fancy, I'm sure, and find some nice American woman with twice my little girl's fortune—and none of her sensitiveness, which would only bore you when once the honeymoon was over. You'll thank me by-and-by for what I am doing now."

The steady imperturbability of his adversary was so evidently not

to be shaken that Howard Barrington felt it useless to fight any longer, and retired for the time defeated and downcast.

Later on in the same day, Mr. Carr gently informed his sister of what had passed.

"Do you love this young man, Pleasance?" he asked in his usual straightforward fashion.

A bright blush dyed her face, but she answered him with equal frankness:

"I have known him too short a time for that, Aleck—but I like him very much."

"Can you trust me well enough to believe that I have acted for your real good in breaking off the acquaintance? You know nothing is further from my mind than any wish to tyrannise over you, Pleasance; but we men know each other better than you women can ever do, and I give you my word that he is not fitted to make you a good husband. He has been attracted more by your fortune than by yourself; I myself have heard him declare frequently that money was the first essential to him in marriage. And I don't want to see you taken as a mere appendage to your fortune, my lassie. You won't bear me any ill-will for what I have done, will you, Pleasance?" he added, almost wistfully.

His sister's smile was certainly not that of a heart-broken maiden.

"Not if you had sent away a dozen lovers, Aleck! What! quarrel with *you* for the sake of a man I had never seen three months ago? That would indeed be a poor return for a lifetime's affection."

Her brother drew a deep sigh of relief and contentment. Evidently, after all, Pleasance's heart had not surrendered to a stranger at the first summons. Her fancy had been pleased by the ideal picture she had drawn in her own mind of Howard Barrington, but of the real man she had sufficient common-sense to know that she knew next to nothing. And Pleasance Carr was so very old-fashioned and prosaic a maiden as to cherish a most unheroine-like faith in the wisdom and kindness of her natural guardian, and actually to believe it possible that he might, on the whole, be better able to judge the character of a new acquaintance than she was herself.

So without protest she acquiesced in her brother's request, that Mr. Barrington might for the present be dropped out of their small circle of friends, and went on her own quiet way as before, not altogether forgetting her banished suitor, perhaps, but with silent faith that if he were really worthy of her love, time and patience would prove him so, and that if the contrary were the case, she would be no loser by her brother's cautious care for her happiness.

## II.

Several months slipped by without any change in the situation, and Howard Barrington was not a little surprised to find that his love

for Pleasance Carr, instead of fading decently away into oblivion, took still firmer hold upon him as time went on. Her old-world simplicity, her "old-fashioned" modesty, her maidenly dignity and innocence—in short, all the charms which had attracted him to her, seemed to shine but the brighter in his memory from force of absence, till his impatience and restlessness under the long separation grew all but unbearable.

But what was to be done to improve matters? Pleasance went but little into general society, and he could discover no good-natured mutual friend ready to afford him a chance of meeting her again. He could scarcely present himself, uninvited, in her brother's house after what had passed, and Pleasance herself had gently but decidedly refused to enter into a correspondence with him. From time to time he met Alexander Carr at his club, where a few civil sentences always passed between them; but he felt that this slender link might be snapped at any moment by any rash or presumptuous action on his own part.

It chanced, however, before many months had elapsed, that a matter of business brought the two men more into contact, and it was therefore no great surprise to the young solicitor when one morning Mr. Carr was ushered into his private room.

But if the visit itself did not surprise him, the same could not be said of the visitor's manner. Usually the most straightforward and concise of mortals, Mr. Carr was that morning evidently nervous and ill at ease, and his words were conspicuously lacking in coherence. After various disjointed remarks respecting the weather and things in general, there came an awkward pause, broken abruptly, after what seemed a considerable time, by the elder man.

"Do you know anything of the Santa Croce Company?"

"Yes, that it's on its last legs. The owners will be let in deeply, I fancy; deeply even for a mine."

"Yes, it's a bad business," replied Mr. Carr abstractedly. "Do you know how deeply it will let me in when it goes?"

"You?" exclaimed the solicitor, greatly startled. "I hope it's nothing serious."

"Serious enough, I can tell you. And, as ill-luck never comes alone, several other things have turned out badly of late; and, in short, I may confide to you that I am in a very nasty corner." Mr. Carr paused abruptly, and looked steadily at the carpet; then, as if with an effort, he continued: "I sail for South America next Friday. Those Santa Croce shares are still worth something, I believe, if anyone sufficiently interested were on the spot to stop the wholesale frauds which are being carried on. At any rate, I can but try; a forlorn hope is better than none."

He stopped again, and his companion looked at him enquiringly.

"You want me, I suppose, to do something for you in your absence?"

"Not exactly ——"

Mr. Carr's nervous and embarrassed manner was strongly in contrast with his usual composure, and he avoided meeting Mr. Barrington's eye.

"The fact is—well, in fact, you see, my sister's money was never properly settled upon her, as it ought to have been. My father, knowing that I had no one but her to care for, left it entirely in my hands, that I might be free to do the best I could for her. I always meant to put things in proper order some day, but it got put off and put off; and now—well, now her money has gone where mine has gone, into the bottom of those Bolivian mines. How much of it will ever come up again, neither I nor any other man living can say."

Howard Barrington felt a great throb of relief and joy at the thought of Pleasance Carr free to be wooed for herself alone, but he hesitated to obtrude his personal feelings upon the worried and embarrassed man before him, and ere he could frame a suitable sentence, his visitor spoke again.

"What I want you to do is to draw up a deed of settlement of four thousand pounds upon her. It's all I can lay my hands upon at this crisis, and a miserable pittance it is, compared with what it ought to have been; but I want that little made safe before I start for Bolivia, for there's no knowing what might happen. I don't want to go to my own solicitors, for reasons you will easily guess. Can you have the deed ready by the day after to-morrow?"

"It shall be ready without fail. But I hope things will turn out better than you fear."

"They *may*—and they may not. In any case, I know I can trust you to keep counsel. And you'll have the deed ready for me to sign on Thursday."

The two men shook hands without more words, and Mr. Carr departed with evident relief at having concluded a trying interview. The settlement was signed in due course, and on the following day Alexander Carr sailed for South America.

A dozen times in the course of the next day or two Howard Barrington told himself that it would be quite impossible for him to obtrude himself upon Pleasance during her brother's absence; nevertheless, at the end of the second day he found himself dismissing a cab at the end of B—— Street, and sauntering past the well-known house, just to glance, with ill-acted indifference, at a window where he had once, for a brief minute, seen her face. The "bijou residence" looked well-kept and trim as ever, but a second glance told him that an ominous bill in a lower window announced the house "To be Let, Furnished," and the words, "Apply to Caretaker within," informed him that the bird — to him, of Paradise—was already flown. He had really not meant to obtrude upon her, but it was very unpleasant to him to find his sacrifice made a compulsory one, and thereby to be deprived of all its honour. He was, however

too true a gentleman to make any endeavours to discover the whereabouts of the young lady while she was deprived of the protection of her natural guardian, and so, with an impatient malediction on his own ill-luck, Mr. Barrington departed from the neighbourhood of B—— Street, and strove to await with patience the return of the dragon, whose very absence was the best protection of his treasure.

A few months later, Howard was one day passing along a busy thoroughfare, when his attention was attracted by a little funeral procession, which was cautiously making its slow and mournful way among the crowded traffic. Two carriages only, and a simple hearse, the second carriage with closed blinds, evidently an empty compliment on the part of the doctor or the solicitor; in the foremost carriage two women, the one in the uniform of a hospital nurse, the other, Pleasance Carr, pale, worn and sad-looking. Mr. Barrington hailed a passing cab, and instructed the driver to follow the cortège at a respectful distance.

Unobserved he stood in the background during the short service in the suburban cemetery, and, still unnoticed, followed the mourners on their homeward journey to an old-fashioned little cottage in an out-of-the-way corner of Old Kensington; then, having made sure that this was indeed her abode, Howard at once withdrew, respecting the sincerity of the girl's evident grief, though unable to guess its cause.

But after the lapse of a day or two, this inconsistent young man began to haunt the neighbourhood of the quiet cottage, with a persistence which soon brought upon him the suspicious attentions of a local policeman. It was not long before his perseverance was well rewarded. He saw Pleasance leave the house alone, and followed her at a sufficient distance till he saw her sink wearily down upon a seat in the most retired part of Kensington Gardens.

It was a quiet hour of the day, and they were practically alone. He went up to her, and held out his hand in silence, for the commonplace words of greeting which he had carefully prepared died unuttered on his tongue before the flash of glad surprise which lit up the girl's pale face.

"I am so glad to see you!"

Evidently the words bore far more than the conventional meaning usually attached to them. It was plain that some trouble was weighing heavily upon her, and once again Howard Barrington felt that he must, for the present, set aside all thoughts of his own hopes and fears.

"What is the matter?" he asked gently, as he seated himself beside her.

"I am alone in the world, it seems to me. I have heard nothing from my brother for months; I dread to think what I may hear next of him. My Aunt Christina, whom he sent for from Scotland before

he went away to come and live with me while he was gone, died quite suddenly a little while ago, and at this time of year all the few people I know in London are out of town, most of them out of England. I have gone through such loneliness and anxiety in the last fortnight! But now I have met you, I know you will advise me for the best."

Mr. Barrington felt a thrill of delight at her simply confessed confidence in him, and resolved there and then to show himself worthy of it.

"Have you no relations or intimate friends to whom you can go?" he asked, impelled by conscience to the question, and inwardly praying for a negative answer.

"None to whom I care to turn in trouble. We have very few relations, and those are distant ones, of whom I know but little. What had I better do?"

"Marry me to-morrow," was the reply which leapt to Howard's lips, but the instinct of civilisation was stronger than the impulse of nature, and he refrained.

"The first thing to be done is, beyond doubt, to try and ascertain your brother's whereabouts. Evidently his letters to you have gone astray."

"You think, then, there is no real fear for his safety?"

"Certainly not. What more likely than that a man travelling in so unsettled a country as Bolivia should be lost sight of for a few weeks? I will find out your brother's agents there, and telegraph to them at once for the latest news of him."

Pleasance drew a deep breath of relief. "I knew you would be able to help me!" she said, looking with frank gratitude at her newly-recovered friend. Warnings and suspicions vanished from her mind like mist before sunlight as she met his eyes, eloquent with honest desire to serve and help her. She had always admitted to herself a possibility that her brother might be wrong in his estimate of Howard Barrington, and now at a bound she rose to independence of thought and action, and gave her affairs into his hands with absolute confidence that he, if anyone, could bring her safely through her troubles.

The event justified her confidence; loyally and diligently Howard served her from that day forward. But in one respect he could do little for her; all efforts to trace her brother proved futile. In vain every inquiry was made; the only information to be gained was that Mr. Carr had last been seen in a town where yellow fever was claiming its scores of victims daily, and the American agents intimated very plainly that they considered any further search would be useless.

These tidings, though broken as gently and gradually as love could break them, were a bitter and enduring grief to Pleasance, and Howard Barrington felt that once again he must set aside all

selfish hopes and longings, and content himself as yet with the place he had won in her heart as a tried and trusted friend.

But when weeks and months had gone by—"when grief was calm and hope was dead"—he felt the time had come at last to think of trying his fortune once more. There were obvious reasons why things could not go on much longer as they were; among other reasons, that he feared pecuniary difficulties would soon be added to the various complications of Pleasance's position. The absence of any proof of death prevented any immediate steps being taken with regard to her brother's estate, and Mr. Carr's old and trusted confidential clerk refused absolutely to afford any information as to the position of his affairs, and obstinately adhered to his belief that Alexander Carr would yet return. A considerable sum had been placed to Pleasance's credit in a London bank before her brother's departure, but it was speedily dwindling away, and she was beginning to wonder whence the next supply would come.

And so, all things considered, Howard thought the time had come to speak, and watched his chance and spoke, telling her how faithfully he had loved her, in spite of all difficulties and discouragements.

"You know why your brother refused to give me a chance?" he asked as he saw her glance fall on her mourning garments.

Pleasance bowed her head in silence.

"I had been very foolish; I had talked lightly and thoughtlessly of things I knew nothing about. Half of what I used to say about marrying for money was said in joke, half in ignorance, but he took it all for sober earnest, and I can't wonder he thought me unworthy to address you. But even he would do me justice now, were he here."

He stopped abruptly, for he had never yet dared to ask Pleasance if she knew of her altered position, but he had gone too far to draw back; Pleasance was looking at him with enquiry in her eyes.

"Did your brother say anything to you about money matters before he left?"

"Very little. He told me he had had some heavy losses, and was going out to see what he could rescue; that was all."

Then Howard told her what he had learned from her brother's lips as to the state of his affairs, softening all he could, but putting the facts clearly before her.

Pleasance looked grave, but not terrified. "Then I am no longer an heiress?" she said, softly, and instead of pallor, a soft, rosy flush crept into her cheeks.

"Thank heaven, no. I don't think even my love for you could have made me able to bear the stigma of a fortune-hunter when once I had felt the sting of the reproach. But now it will be in no man's power to cast that in my teeth. There may be some little remnant of your brother's fortune left, who knows?—but you will believe me now, perhaps, when I tell you that I neither know nor care."

"I do believe you." It was a very soft whisper, but not too low for a lover's ear.

"And you can be content to be the wife of a comparatively poor man? You can do without many of the things you have been used to all your life? You will take my love instead of all the luxuries and pleasures which a richer man would give you?"

"What more does a woman want than the love of the man—she loves?"

Pleasance had lifted her eyes bravely as she began her answer, but they fell again before its whispered end met the ear bent down to catch the trembling words.

Two months later she walked quietly to a neighbouring church with her lover, to leave it half an hour afterwards as his wife. After all, Howard Barrington was a man of determination and resources.

"A gentleman to see you, sir."

The office-boy's voice trembled with suppressed excitement, and his eyes were opened to an alarming extent.

"Who is it?" Mr. Barrington was busy, and spoke shortly.

"Please, sir—it's a gentleman."

"Ask his name."

"Please, sir, I know it! Don't be frightened, sir, it's only Mr. Alexander Carr—or a ghost!"

"Idiot! Get out of my way."

The next moment Howard was grasping the hand of a gaunt and bearded stranger, very unlike the trim, scrupulously-attired visitor of a year earlier.

"So old Stevens was right, after all! He always said you'd turn up again yet."

"It was scarcely an effusive greeting, but the hand-grasp told a truer tale. Mr. Carr smiled grimly.

"Old Stevens knows me well: he knew I should take a deal of killing. But I've been very near to death," he added more gravely. "First, laid up with fever for months, in an out-of-the-way hole you never even heard of; then knocked on the head by a falling beam in an earthquake shock. I don't think South America stands much chance of welcoming me back as a resident!"

"Why did you not telegraph to us when you returned to civilisation?" asked Howard, not unnaturally.

"I forgot all about it in the bustle of getting aboard a sailing-vessel which was just leaving the little port where I at last found myself; and after we got in—well, I thought I should rather like to take you all by surprise."

"Do you know ——"

Howard stopped short. It seemed slightly awkward to ask a man if he knew that you had married his sister.

"I know all about it. I went to find her at the cottage I had

aken for her before I left England, and there got her address. I've een down to Wimbledon this morning, and seen her. What did ou marry her for?"

The question was abruptly, but not unkindly, put.

"Love."

"So she says. Well, I can't understand it. Over and over again ou assert positively that you mean to marry for money, and then ou marry a girl who has barely enough settled upon her to buy her rocks and bonnets!"

"I'd rather have her without a penny than the greatest heiress n all England, or America either."

"Then what made you talk such a lot of confounded rubbish, I ant to know? How was I to know you meant it all to be taken by Rule of Contrary? A man should say what he means, sir!"

Howard Barrington bowed his head to the sudden storm in rudent silence.

"And I thought I had made all safe before I left her! I felt onvinced that after what I told you, you would be choked off with a engeance. Didn't you believe me, sir?"

Mr. Carr was deliberately trying to work himself into a passion, ut with poor success.

"Certainly I believed you. Were you lying?"

The coolness of the question gave the delinquent the upper hand t once. The brown and bearded face of the elder man took a leeper shade of colour.

"No—that is, not exactly."

"I am glad to hear it was not *exactly* lying; a man should *always* ay what he means."

Howard's face was impenetrably solemn, but the twinkle in his eye ould not be suppressed. It met an answering gleam in that of his rother-in-law, and without further preamble the two men burst into laugh, loud and long. Then, by common consent, they again hook hands.

"It was a good idea, a capital plan," said Alexander Carr regretully, as he wiped his eyes, "but it went wrong somewhere."

"Then you really ——"

"I really had had some very serious losses, but I can't deny that I howed you the blackest possible side of the matter. And as to that ettlement, well, it was my first and last attempt at diplomacy. I new I must be a long time absent, and I thought you a very clever nd unscrupulous young fellow, and I said to myself, 'All's fair in ove and war.' So I had that settlement drawn up just to give colour o what I had told you. You see, I couldn't endure the thought o ny little Pleasance being snapped up for her money's sake, and every oman is a fool where matrimony is concerned."

"And so you took the very course which gave her to me. In pite of all I used to say, Miss Carr the heiress would have been

quite safe from me in her guardian's absence; but I had no such scruples to overcome about the girl whose settlement I knew 'would scarcely buy her gowns and bonnets.'"

"Well, well; say no more about it! I suppose nature did not cut me out for a diplomat. At any rate, *she* is happy, and you say *you* are happy, so I must perforce be happy too. Now, put up those papers and come back with me to Wimbledon, and to-morrow we'll have a new settlement drawn up to a very different tune. Fate is too strong for you, you see; you've married your heiress after all!"

## THE THREE AGES.

(From the French of Marie Constantin.)

My dears, when I was young like you—
O, days that long ago took wing!—
I had your wit, your sweetness too,
And loved, like you, the spring.
Fondly do I remember still
How dear to me were fields and flowers;
How dear the hearts in lighter hours
Made captive in the gay quadrille:
A merry child like you, my dears,
And such was I at fifteen years.

Later, my heart, less wild and gay,
To one devout espousal moved;
And wedded joys, how sweet are they,
To love and to be loved!
But sometimes pensive and apart,
I prayed in secret sighs to heaven,
That some dear angel might be given
To stir in me a mother's heart:
Wife and fond mother too, my dears,
And such was I at thirty years.

O later! Onward still and on
Time flies, like an advancing wave,
And summer, autumn, both are gone,
With all the joys they gave!
Yet, while we droop with age and pain,
The heart that to our babes we give
In their sweet innocence may live,
And with their babes be young again;
And such am I at length, my dears,
With my full span of eighty years.

GEORGE COTTERELL.

THE ARGOSY.

*OCTOBER, 1891.*

# THE FATE OF THE HARA DIAMOND.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### A LITTLE DINNER FOR THREE.

TWO or three days passed quietly away without any particular incident that need be recorded here. Captain Ducie was much with the Van Loals. Each day they went on an excursion together, and on these occasions the Captain always acted the part of charioteer. As they were driving back into St. Helier one afternoon, said Ducie:

"I have ventured to order a dinner for three in my rooms for this evening. May I hope that you and Miss Van Loal will honour me with your company?"

"We will accept your invitation with pleasure," said the old man, "on condition that you dine with us to-morrow in return."

"A condition that I shall be happy to comply with," answered Ducie. "I have something of a very rare and curious nature to show you after dinner: something respecting which I wish you to favour me with your opinion."

"You may command my humble services in any way," answered Van Loal.

At seven to the minute Mr. Van Loal, his daughter and Captain Ducie sat down to a well-served dinner in the sitting-room of the latter. Mirpah looked very lovely, but paler than ordinary. She seemed anxious and distrait, Ducie thought, and was more than usually silent during the progress of the meal. In the delicate curves of her mouth Ducie fancied that he detected a lurking sadness. He felt that he would have given much to fathom the cause of her unwonted melancholy. What if this incipient sadness were merely a symptom of dawning love? What if she were learning to regard him with some small portion of the same feeling that he had for her? Hope whispered faintly in his ear that such might possibly be the case; but he was not essentially a vain man, and, with an impatient shrug, he dismissed the seductive whisper, and turned his attention

to other things. On one point his mind was quite made up. The very next opportunity that he should have of being alone with Mr. Van Loal he would ask that gentleman's permission to put a certain question to his daughter; and if anything might be augured from a man's manner, his request would meet with no unkind reception. The opportunity he sought would hardly be afforded him this evening. Captain Ducie's sitting-room would, on this occasion, have to fill the offices both of dining and drawing-room. There would be no occasion for Miss Van Loal to retire after the cloth should be drawn. The gentlemen might smoke their cigars on the balcony. What Captain Ducie had to say to Mr. Van Loal would very well keep till morning. He had something particular to say to Mr. Van Loal this evening, but it was something that did not preclude the presence of Mirpah. When the time drew near that he had fixed on in his own mind as the proper time for introducing this one special topic—about half-an-hour after the withdrawal of the cloth—he hardly knew in what terms to begin. He could think of no periphrastical opening by means of which he could introduce the all-important topic. In sheer despair of any readier mode, he at length plunged boldly into the breach.

"I have been informed, Mr. Van Loal, that you are a diamond merchant," he said, "and that you have a wide knowledge of gems of various kinds, and can consequently form a trustworthy opinion as to the value of any that may be submitted for your inspection."

"Well—yes," said Van Loal, with a slow, dubious smile, "I am, or rather was, a dealer in diamonds, howsoever you may have ascertained that fact."

"It was I who told Captain Ducie, papa," said Mirpah in her quiet, clear tones.

"Quite right, my love. I am not ashamed of my profession," answered the old man. Then, turning to Ducie, he said: "Any information that I may be in possession of on the various subjects embraced by my experience I shall be most happy to afford you."

"My object in introducing the topic is to ask you to do me the favour to appraise a certain diamond which I have in my possession: to let me have your opinion as to its qualities, good or bad, together with an estimate of its probable value."

Mr. Van Loal whistled under his breath. "Diamonds are very difficult things to appraise with any degree of correctness, especially where there is any particular feature about them, either in size, colour, water, or cutting, that separates them from the ordinary category of such things. Is the diamond to which you refer an ordinary one? or has it any special features of its own?"

"It has several special features, such as its size, its colour, and its extraordinary brilliance. But I will fetch it, and you shall examine it for yourself. Pardon my leaving you for one moment."

With a smile and a bow, Captain Ducie rose from his chair,

crossed the floor, and disappeared within an inner room. Mr. Van Loal and his daughter exchanged glances full of meaning. The pallor deepened on Mirpah's cheek: she toyed nervously with her fan; and even the old man, ordinarily so calm and self-contained, looked anxious and brimful of nervous excitement. His fingers wandered frequently to his waistcoat, in one pocket of which there seemed to be some object of whose presence there he needed frequently to assure himself.

Ducie returned after an absence of two minutes. He too seemed to have caught that contagion of nervous excitement which marked the demeanour of his two guests. Was he warned by some subtle instinct that one of the great crises of his life was at hand? Or was he merely a prey to that vulgar fear which all who practise the art of illegal conveyancing must or ought to feel when the proceeds of their nefarious deeds are submitted for the first time to the common light of day?

"This is the gem which I am desirous of submitting to your inspection."

He held out his right hand, and there on his open palm the Great Hara Diamond sparkled and glowed, a chrysolite of pure green fire. An exclamation of surprise and delight burst simultaneously from the lips of Mirpah and her father.

"In the whole course of my experience I have never seen anything to equal this," said Van Loal, as he donned his spectacles. "May I take it into my own fingers to examine?"

"Certainly; I have brought it in order that you may do so."

Speaking thus, Captian Ducie dropped the Diamond into the extended palm of the supposed dealer. Some inward qualm next moment made him half put out his hand as if he would have reclaimed the Diamond there and then. But the lean fingers of Van Loal had already closed over the gem, and Ducie's arm dropped aimlessly by his side.

Mr. Van Loal rose from his seat and went close up to the lamp that he might examine the stone more minutely. There he was joined by Mirpah, whose curiosity quite equalled that of her father. They both stood gazing at it for full two minutes without speaking.

"Wonderful! Magnificent!" exclaimed Mr. Van Loal at length. "Words fail to express the admiration I feel at sight of so rare a gem. Can it be possible, Captain Ducie, that you are the fortunate possessor of such a treasure? I should think myself one of the most favoured of mortals did such a Diamond belong to me."

"It is mine," answered Ducie, calmly and deliberately. "It has been in the possession of our family for two centuries. Originally it came from the Indies, and it is said to have been worn by the great Aurungzebe himself."

"If he never did wear it, he ought to have done so. Even

among his remarkable treasures he can have possessed but few stones equal to this one. You can never be called a poor man, Captain Ducie, while you retain this in your possession. Mirpah, my child, what say you?"

"What can I say, papa? I am not enthusiastic, as you know, nor given to indulging in notes of admiration. I can only say that in my poor experience I have never seen anything to equal it. Diamonds as large, or larger, I have seen several times, but they were all white, or of inferior water. I have never seen a green one at all comparable to this one either for size or brilliancy, and I think, papa, that even your wider experience will, in this respect, tally with mine."

"Completely so," answered the old man. "I question whether, among all the crown jewels of Europe, there is a green diamond that can in any way match it, either for colour or brilliancy. Captain Ducie, your treasure is almost unique."

"Can you furnish me with anything like an estimate of its probable value?"

"I am doubtful whether I can. Were it an ordinary white diamond the value could be easily calculated when once the weight was known. But with a green diamond the case is very different. In addition to what its value would be as an ordinary diamond, it would command an extra or fancy price in the market, from the rarity of its colour in conjunction with its size. The additional value is a most difficult thing to gauge accurately. Even among professional dealers you would hardly find two who would name the same figure, or the same figure within a very wide margin, if called upon to estimate the worth of your green diamond."

"Still," said Ducie, "I should like you to furnish me with some approximate estimate of its probable value."

"What is its weight?"

"Nearly eighty-five carats."

"In that case you may estimate its value somewhere between one hundred and forty and two hundred thousand pounds."

The Diamond had been passed on by Mr. Van Loal to his daughter for examination.

"A gem fit for an empress to wear!" was Mirpah's remark as she handed the stone back to her father.

"Observe the mode in which this Diamond is cut," said Van Loal. "It has been done in the Indies after a style which has been handed down from father to son for a thousand years. You should let it be operated upon by our Amsterdam cutters. They would turn it out at the end of six months, less in size it is true, but so greatly improved in every other respect, that you would hardly know it for the same gem. May I ask whether it is your intention to dispose of it by private treaty?"

"It is my intention ultimately so to do," answered Ducie.

"I suppose you have no objection to my trying the temper of your Diamond on the window?"

"None whatever," said Ducie, with a shrug. "You may write your name on every pane in the hotel if you please."

"That would indeed be a painful exhibition of vanity," replied Van Loal, with a weak attempt at a pun.

Speaking thus, he rose from his seat, and crossed the floor, holding the Diamond between the thumb and finger of his right hand.

Curtains of crimson damask draped the windows. One of these curtains Van Loal drew noisily aside. A second or two later those in the room could hear the slow scratching of the Diamond on the glass.

Mirpah's cheek grew still paler as the sound met her ears.

Just then Ducie was thinking as much of the beautiful girl before him as of the Diamond.

"I hope you have not forgotten our engagement to visit Elizabeth Castle to-morrow," he said. "It will be low water at noon, and we can either walk across the sands to it or ride, as may seem best to you."

"I have not forgotten," said Mirpah, softly, and from her eyes there shot a swift, half-sorrowful glance that thrilled him to the heart.

"I must make my opportunity to-morrow and propose to her," he said to himself. "I never thought to love again, but I love Mirpah Van Loal, and will make her my wife if she will let me do so. Perhaps the future may have a quiet happiness in store for me, such as I never dreamed of in all the wild days that have come and gone since my father turned me out of doors, and I first thought myself a man. I begin to think there is something in life that I have altogether missed."

This thought was working in his mind when Mr. Van Loal came back from the window, still holding the Diamond between the thumb and finger of his right hand. He deposited it lightly in Ducie's palm.

"A wonderful gem, my dear sir—a truly wonderful gem!" said the old man. "I envy you the possession of such a treasure. In all my experience I have never seen or heard of its equal. But you must allow me to say that I think it very unwise on your part to carry so valuable an item of property about with you on your travels. Let me recommend you to deposit it with your banker, or in some other safe custody, as soon as ever you get back to England; unless, indeed, you may wish to dispose of it, in which case allow me to offer my humble services as negotiator of the transaction for you."

"No one on the island, save yourself and Miss Van Loal, is aware that I carry such an article about with me; consequently there is no fear of its being stolen. As it happens, I *am* desirous of disposing

of the Diamond—in fact, I should have sold it some time ago had I known how to conduct such a transaction without running the risk of being egregiously duped. Your kind offer of your valuable services has disposed of that difficulty, and, with your permission, we will discuss the matter in extenso to-morrow."

He had risen while speaking, and he now went away into the inner room, carrying the Diamond with him. As soon as his back was turned a quick, meaning glance passed between father and daughter. There was a look of triumph in the eyes of Van Loal which told Mirpah that the object which had brought them all the way from their Midlandshire home had been successfully achieved.

No word passed between the two, and Ducie came back in less than a minute. Conversation was resumed, and still the theme was diamonds and rare gems. As was only to be expected from one who called himself a dealer in such merchandise, Mr. Van Loal showed himself to be deeply versed in all matters relating to precious stones. Captain Ducie was greatly interested. The little company did not break up till a late hour.

"At noon to-morrow. You will not forget?" said Ducie, as he held Mirpah's hand for a moment at the door of his room. She made him no answer in words, but again that strange half-sorrowful look shot from her eyes to his, and her soft hand clasped his in a way that it had never been betrayed into doing before. Then they parted. Captain Ducie's dreams that night were happy dreams.

Mirpah Van Loal must either have forgotten her overnight promise to Captain Ducie, or have held it in small regard, seeing that she left St. Helier by the Southampton boat at six forty-five the next morning. She was accompanied by her father, and by a clean-shaven young gentleman, dressed in black, who had been living a very secluded life for some time past at Button's Hotel.

As the boat steamed slowly out of the harbour, Mirpah threw a last searching glance among the crowd with which the pier was lined. "Poor Captain Ducie!" she murmured half aloud. Her father, who happened to be standing close by, peered up curiously into her face and saw that her eyes were wet. He did not speak, but moved further away, and left her to her own thoughts.

They had an excellent passage and Mirpah bore up bravely. Some time after leaving Guernsey, an English steamer bound for the Islands passed them a few hundred yards to leeward. The clean-shaven young gentleman in black was watching the stranger keenly through his glass when an expression of surprise burst from his lips. "What is it, James? What is it that you see, my boy?" asked Mr. Van Loal.

"On yonder boat I see an old acquaintance of yours and mine."

The old man took the glass and scanned the passing ship, the passengers of which were scanning the Southampton boat eagerly in

return, and had their faces turned full towards it. The old man laid down the glass after a minute's silent observation.

"James," he said in a solemn tone, "unless my eyes deceive me greatly, the mulatto Cleon is on board yonder ship."

"You are right, father. Cleon *is* on board that ship. He was not killed, then, after all, in his encounter with Captain Ducie."

"Such a fellow as that takes a deal of killing. On one point we may be pretty sure: that by some means or other he has discovered Captain Ducie's whereabouts and is now on his track."

"Wants his revenge, perhaps."

"Wants to recover the Hara Diamond, mayhap."

Madgin Junior laughed. "He will hardly succeed in doing that, father. Mr. Van Loal has been in the field before him."

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### CLEON REDIVIVUS.

When Madgin Junior averred that he saw Cleon, the mulatto servant of the late M. Platzoff, on board the steamer which would be due in Guernsey some two hours later, he stated no more than the truth. That dusky individual was there, looking as well as ever he had looked in his life; sprucely, even elegantly dressed; and having a watchful eye on his two small articles of luggage: a miniature portmanteau, and a tiny black leather bag. At Guernsey he quitted the steamer, and waiting on the pier till he saw it fairly under way again for the sister island, he entered at once into negotiations with some of the hardy boatmen generally to be found lounging about St. Peter's port. The result was that a pretty little skiff was brought round, into which Mr. Cleon and his luggage were carefully stowed, the whole being taken charge of by a couple of sailors who at once hoisted their sail and stood out in a straight line for Jersey. The wind was in their favour, but the tide was against them nearly the whole way, and it was quite dark before they got under the lee of the lighthouse and found themselves safely sheltered in the little harbour of St. Helier. It is quite possible that Mr. Cleon may have had some motive in not wishing to land by daylight; at all events he seemed in nowise dissatisfied by his late arrival, but paid his boatmen liberally and dismissed them.

Skirting the head of the harbour cautiously, with his coat collar turned up and his hat well slouched over his eyes, Cleon entered the first low public-house to which he came and called for a glass of rum. A number of men, sailors chiefly, and loafers of various kinds, passed in and out while he stood at the bar, at each one of whom he glanced keenly. He waited nearly half an hour before he found the sort of face he wanted—one in which low cunning and intelligence were combined. He took the owner of this face aside and

held a private parley with him for full ten minutes. Then the man went away and Mr. Cleon ordered a private room and some tea.

He was still discussing his chop when the man got back.

"Well—what news? Make your report," said the mulatto.

"All right, Captain," with a touch of his forelock. "Found out all you wanted to know, right slick away. Make you no error on that point. I promised to do it, and I done it. Oh, yes. There's no lies about what I'm going to tell you. Captain Ducie is stopping at the 'Royal George,' and has been stopping there for the last ten days. Up to last night most of his time was spent with an old gentleman and a young lady, father and daughter, of the name of Van Loal. But they went away by this morning's boat, and Captain Ducie has been mooning about all day, seeming as if he hardly knew what to do with himself. Just now he is up the town at one of the billiard-saloons, and is not expected home before eleven."

"You know all the billiard-rooms in the town. Go and find out at which one of them Captain Ducie is engaged, and whether he is so fixed that he is likely to remain there for some time to come."

In less than a quarter of an hour the man was back. "The Captain is playing pool with a lot more swells at Baxter's rooms, and seems well fixed for another hour to come."

The mulatto had already paid his bill, and was ready for a start. "Now show me the 'Royal George' Hotel," said he.

The hotel was pointed out and the man paid and dismissed. Cleon entered the hotel with the air of a proprietor, and asked to be shown a private sitting-room. He was shown into one on the first floor. It was small but comfortable. He expressed himself as being perfectly satisfied with it, and then he ordered dinner.

While the meal was being got ready, Mr. Cleon stated that he should like to see such bedrooms as were disengaged. He was rather fastidious, he added, in the choice of a bedroom, and should prefer making his own selection. He was very pleasant and jocular with the chambermaid who showed him round.

In all there were five bedrooms in want of occupants, and Mr. Cleon was not satisfied till he had looked into each of them. "Come, now," he said, after peeping into the fifth and last, "if I am rightly informed, you have a military gentleman stopping in the house, a Captain ——"

"Ducie," added the girl, as the mulatto stopped, as if in doubt.

"Ah, that is the name. Captain Ducie. Now, soldiers generally know how to pick out the best quarters, and if I were to choose a bedroom on the same floor as the Captain's I could hardly go far astray! Now, I dare say, you could tell me the number of Captain Ducie's room?"

"The Captain's room is number fourteen. Number ten, the next room but three to it, is empty, and you can have it if you choose."

"I engage number ten on the spot," said Mr. Cleon, emphatically.

See that the sheets are properly aired, and here are a couple of alf-crowns for your trouble."

Mr. Cleon ate his dinner in solitary state, and retired to his bed- oom at an early hour. To his bedroom, but not to bed. After bout five minutes his candle was put out. A minute or two later ie door of his room was noiselessly opened, and showed him anding on the threshold, tall and black, like a spirit of evil in the im starlight. After listening intently for a little while, he stole ently along the corridor from his own room to the door of number urteen. This door he tried, and found that it yielded at once to is hand. He opened it a little way and peeped in. The room was ark and empty. Still listening, with every sense on the alert, he ruck a noiseless match. The tiny flame, bright and clear, and sting for about half a minute, was sufficient to enable him to photo- aph on his memory the position of every article of furniture in the oom. It was also sufficient to enable him to note something of uch greater importance: that there was not only a stout lock on ie door of number fourteen, but that the door could be still further ecured on the inside by means of a strong bolt. He smothered the alediction that rose to his lips when he saw this, and then he stole ck to his own room, with the look of a baffled wild beast on his ce.

Even now he did not go to bed, but sat waiting in the dark, with s door slightly ajar, for the coming of the tenant of number four- en. Upwards of an hour passed away before he heard Captain ucie's step on the stair. He seemed to draw back within himself he heard it: to crouch, as if getting ready for a spring. But the oment Captain Ducie entered number fourteen, Cleon was at the or of his own room and listening. He fell back a pace or two, d shook his fist savagely in the air as he heard what he had felt most sure he should hear. He heard Captain Ducie double-lock e door of number fourteen, and then shoot home the brass bolt, as ough still further to secure himself against intruders. The mulatto's arp, white teeth clashed together viciously as the sound met his r.

"Only wait!" he whispered down the dark corridor. Then he nt in, and shut and locked the door of his own room.

Next morning he ordered breakfast to be taken up to bed to him. e was very unwell, he said, and should not be able to leave his om all that day. But his illness, whatever it might be, did not seem affect his appetite. Luncheon, and afterwards dinner, were sent to him in due course. At nine o'clock he rang his bell and dered a bottle of claret. At the same time he instructed the waiter at he should not want anything more till morning, and that he ist on no account be disturbed till that time.

He had been singularly uneasy and watchful all day, listening quently, with his door slightly ajar, to the downstairs noises of the

hotel, sometimes even venturing a few yards down the corridor wher the house was more than usually quiet, but retreating quickly to hi den at the slightest sound of an approaching footstep. Once he hac even penetrated into Captain Ducie's room for a few seconds. "Ah scélérat! I shall have you yet," he muttered, as he shut himself ou of the room after his brief survey.

Now that daylight had faded into dusk, and dusk had deepenec into night, his proceedings were still more singular. After finishing his bottle of wine, he proceeded to take off his ordinary oute clothing, and in place of it to induct himself into a tight-fitting suit o some strong dark woven stuff that fitted him like a glove. Roun his waist he buckled a belt of dull black leather, and into this belt h stuck a small sheathed dagger. Pendent from the belt was a tin pouch made of the same material, into which he put some half dozer allumettes, and two small cones of some red material, each of then about four inches in height. This done, his toilette was finished After a last glance round, he put out the candles, opened the door and halted on the threshold for a moment or two to listen.

The night was clear and unclouded, and through the staircase win dow the stars shone brightly in. The corridor was filled wit their ghostly light. Midway in it stood the mulatto, black from hea to foot, except for his two ferocious eyes that gleamed redly fron under his heavy brows like danger signals pointing out the road t death. A pause of a few seconds and then he shut and locked th door of his room—locked it from the outside and put away the ke in the tiny pouch by his side.

The quiet starlight seemed to fall away from him affrighted as h moved down the dusky corridor. Now that the door was shu behind him he went on without hesitation or pause. He had only few paces to go. On reaching the door of number fourteen h turned the handle, went in, and closed the door softly behind him.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### PASTILLE-BURNING.

RARELY had Captain Ducie felt in a pleasanter frame of mind tha when he went down to breakfast in the course of the forenoon follov ing the evening on which he had shown Mr. Van Loal and h daughter the Hara Diamond. Several circumstances had combine to render him more than ordinarily cheerful. He had fully made u his mind to propose to Mirpah Van Loal that very day, and he fe little fear that his suit would be rejected. Once married, he wou cut his old associations for ever, would probably leave England f several years, and in some remote spot would, with his lovely wif lead a life such as one sometimes reads of in idyls and romances bu

ely sees reduced to practice in this work-a-day world. Mr. Van al had appraised the Diamond at a very tolerable sum, and through ; influence he would doubtless be able to dispose of it quietly, and a way that would give rise to no suspicion as to the mode by ich it had come into his possession. The proceeds of the sale, liciously invested, would be productive of an annual income on ich it would be possible to live in comfort wherever he might oose to pitch his tent. Lastly, all apprehension as to any results ich might possibly have accrued to him from the sudden death of Platzoff, and the subsequent events at Bon Repos, had utterly d away. He had got by this time to feel as if the Diamond were much his own as though it had been given to him or handed down him as a family heirloom. If any uncomfortable thought nnected with the death of Platzoff and his appropriation of the amond ever crossed his mind, it was dismissed with ignominy, like poor relation, almost as soon as it made itself known. Captain cie was not a man to let his conscience trouble him whenever it hed to question him respecting any transaction the results of ich had proved prosperous to himself. In such cases he bade it gone, turning it out by main force, and shutting the door in its e. But whenever it stole in and began to reproach him for his duct in any little affair that in its results had proved disastrous, er socially or pecuniarily, then did Edmund Ducie bow his head all humility before the veiled monitress, and cry mea culpa, and vail his naughtiness with many inward groans, and promise to end his ways in time to come. But it may be doubted whether the latter case his regret did not arise less from having done that ich was wrong, than because the wrong had proved unsuccessful in npassing the ends for which it was done.

Be that as it may, Captain Ducie's conscience did not seem to uble him much as he came downstairs this pleasant autumn rning, humming an air from the "Trovatore," and giving the last shing touches to his filbert-shaped nails. He rang the bell for akfast, and turned over, half-contemptuously, the selection of vspapers on the side table.

'Has Mr. Van Loal come down to breakfast yet, do you know?" asked when the waiter re-entered the room.

'I will ascertain, sir, and let you know."

Two minutes later the waiter came back. "Mr. Van Loal, sir, Miss Van Loal, left this morning by the Southampton boat."

'What!" shouted Ducie, jumping to his feet as though he had n shot.

The waiter repeated his statement.

'Either you are crazy or you have been misinformed," said Ducie, temptuously, as he quietly resumed his seat. "Go again, and rtain the truth this time."

resently the waiter returned. "What I told you before, sir, is

quite true. Mr. Van Loal and his daughter left this morning by the early boat."

A horrible sickening dread took possession of Ducie. He staggered to his feet, his face like that of a corpse. Was it—was it possible that by some devil's trick the Diamond had been conjured from him? His hand went instinctively to the spot where he knew it ought to be. No—it was not gone. He could feel it there, just below his heart, in the little sealskin bag that hung from his neck by a steel chain. He had replaced it there after taking it from the fingers of Van Loal the preceding night, and he had not looked at it since.

Greatly relieved, he turned to the waiter with a face that was still strangely white and contorted. "What you have just told me is almost incredible," he said. "In fact, I cannot believe it without further proof. Go and bring to me someone who was an eye-witness of the departure of Mr. and Miss Van Loal."

The waiter went. Ducie was still unnerved, and he poured himself out a cup of coffee with a hand that trembled in spite of all his efforts to keep it still. But his appetite for breakfast was utterly gone.

Then the waiter came back and ushered into the room, first the young lady who kept the accounts of the establishment; second, the boots. The young lady advanced with charming self-possession, made her little curtsey, and broke the ice at once.

"I am informed, sir, that you wish to have some particulars respecting the departure of Mr. and Miss Van Loal," she said. "They dined with you last evening in your own room, if I am not mistaken. Yes. Well, sir, about eleven o'clock, just as I was closing my books for the night, I was surprised by a visit from Mr. Van Loal. 'Oblige me by making out my little account,' said he; 'and include in it to-morrow's breakfast. I am recalled to England by important letters, and must go by the first boat. You will further oblige me by making no mention of my departure till after I am gone. I have several friends to whom I ought to say good-bye, but I do not feel equal to the occasion, and wish to slip quietly away without saying a word.' Mr. Van Loal waited while I made out the account. Then he paid me and bade me good-night. When I got up this morning, I found that he and his daughter had gone by the early boat. James, here, took their luggage down to the pier and saw them start."

"Did you with your own eyes see Mr. and Miss Van Loal start by the Southampton boat this morning?"

"I did, sir. I was instructed to look after their luggage this morning. I took it down to the boat and saw the old gentleman and the young lady safe aboard. They went below deck at once, and two minutes later the steamer was off."

"A very clear and conclusive narrative," said Ducie. "You are the man, I believe, who looks after the letters and attends to the post bag?"

I am, sir."

Were there any letters by the afternoon post yesterday for Mr. Loal?"

No, sir, not one. I can speak positively to that."

Left alone, Captain Ducie sat down in a perfect maze of perplexity. At Van Loal and his daughter were gone he could no longer bt. But why had they gone without a hint or word of farewell? ey must have known at the time they were dining with him the vious evening that they were about to sail on the following rning, and yet they allowed him to plan and arrange for the day's ursion as though any thought of change were the last thing in r minds. And Mirpah, too—what of her? What of the woman om it was his intention to have proposed to that very day? Had merely been playing with him all along in order that she might him at last? He could not understand the thing at all. He mazed, utterly dumbfounded, like a man walking in a dream. e more he thought of the affair, the less comprehensible it seemed im. His amour propre was terribly wounded. More intolerable n all else was the sense there was upon him of having been out- ed, of having in some mysterious way been made the victim of lot with the beginning and ending of which he was utterly un- uainted. He had been hoodwinked—bamboozled—he felt sure it; but how and for what purpose he was quite at a loss to om. His Diamond was perfectly safe; he had never gambled n Van Loal; whatever his looks might have conveyed, he had er spoken a word of love to Mirpah, so that it was impossible she ld have taken offence with him on that score. What, then, was meaning of it all? He rang the bell to inquire whether Mr. Van l had left no note or message of any kind for him. None what- r, was the reply.

"What a preposterous idiot I must have been," murmured Ducie, fancy that this woman, whom I proposed to make my wife, ed for me the least bit in the world! She is like the rest of her —neither better nor worse. From highest to lowest they are e and fickle—every one."

He spent a miserable day, wandering aimlessly about; he neither w nor cared whither; nursing his wounds, and vainly striving to lerstand for what reason he had been struck so mercilessly and in dark. A thousand times that day he cursed the name of pah Van Loal. Once he paused in his pacings of the lonely ds, and, not satisfied with the evidence of his fingers that the mond was safe in its sealskin pocket, he took it out of its ing-place and gazed on it, and pressed it to his lips, even as M. l Platzoff had done in his time, and as, in all probability, ndreds had done before him.

"Fool! after all my experience of life and the world, to believe in chimera of woman's love!" he said bitterly to himself. "Man's

only real friend in this world is money, or that which can command money. The rest is only a shadow on the wall, gone ere it can be clutched."

He had been wandering about all day without food, and when night set in he felt nervous and dispirited.

He made a pretence of eating his dinner as usual, but he sickened at his food and sought consolation in a double allowance of wine. Later on he strolled out with a cigar, and made his way to a certain billiard-room where he was not unknown. He was too nervous to touch a cue himself, but he found his excitement in betting on other men's play. After having lost five sovereigns, he went back to his hotel. This was the night of Cleon's arrival at Jersey.

His mood next day was one of sullen bitterness. It was a mood that, under other circumstances, might have incited him to do something desperate, were it only to find a safety-valve for his pent-up feelings. In such a mood, had he been on active service, and had the need arisen, he would have gloried in offering himself as the leader of some forlorn hope. In such a mood, had he been a burglar, it would have fared ill with anyone who stood up in defence of that which he had made up his mind to take as his own. Happily or unhappily, in such crises of everyday life we have no choice save to eat our own hearts, and drink our own tears, and wear the mask of comedy to the world, while hiding that other mask of tragedy under our robe, which we venture to don only when we are in secret and alone.

Captain Ducie, behind the mask of comedy which he presented to the world, hid a heart that in a few short hours had become surcharged with gall, and that would never again, however long his life might be, be entirely free from bitterness. He felt like one of those savage caged creatures who, when they have nothing else to war against, will sometimes turn and rend themselves. He felt that he should like to do himself some bodily injury: to put his foot under the car of Juggernaut, had he been a Hindoo; or to have swung with a hook through his loins, above the populace of some Indian fair.

All day long he loafed about in this savage mood, smoking innumerable cigars and twisting the ends of his moustache viciously.

He was only anxious for one thing, and that was for the arrival of the afternoon post. It is possible that he expected some line of explanation from Van Loal. If so, he was disappointed. That day's post brought him no letters.

After dinner he joined a whist party in the coffee-room. Later on the quartette composing the party adjourned to a private room upstairs. Captain Ducie was ordinarily an abstemious man, especially when cards were on the tapis, but to-night he was reckless and took more wine than was good for him. It was nearly one o'clock when

he party broke up, and Captain Ducie never afterwards remembered ow he reached his own room.

That he reached his room in safety cannot be doubted, because he ound himself safely in bed when he awoke next morning. But efore that time arrived a strange scene had been enacted in Captain Ducie's bedroom.

As before stated, it was nearly one o'clock when he reached his oom, and five minutes after getting into bed he had fallen into a roken troubled sleep in which he enacted over again the varied ncidents of the evening's play. After moaning and tossing about or more than an hour, he woke up, feeling parched from head to oot and with a pain across his forehead like a fiery hoop that seemed o be slowly shrivelling up his brain. He got out of bed and emptied he decanter on his dressing-table at a draught. Then he plunged is head into a large basin of water, and that revived him still more. His head still ached, but not so violently as before. He went back o bed, cursing his folly for having taken so much wine. The night-ight was burning as usual—dim and ghostly; barely sufficient to ight up the familiar features of the room—for Captain Ducie had a trange superstitious horror of sleeping in the dark. He lay on his ack, with his hands clasped above his head and with shut eyes. leep did not come back to him at once. His imagination went andering here and there into odd nooks and corners that it had ot visited for years. By-and-by he slid into a state of semi-uncon-ciousness, in which, without entirely losing all knowledge of time nd place—of the fact that he was now lying there in bed with a easily headache—he yet mixed up certain scenes and events from reamland, interfusing the real and the imaginary in such a way that or the time being the line of demarcation between the two was tterly lost, and where one ended and the other began he would ust then have found it impossible to determine. He was playing ards with one of the huge stone images that guarded the gates of Memphis, and was yet at the same time conscious of being in bed. He could see the grotesque shadows thrown by the night-light on the all, and he could hear the ticking of his watch in the little pocket few inches above his head. In his game with the stone image, in hose eyes he seemed to read the garnered patience of many cen-uries, he was aware that unless he could succeed in trumping his dversary's trick with the five of clubs the game would be irre-ocably lost, and he, Ducie, would be comdemned to be buried live for five hundred years in the heart of the great Pyramid. The wentieth deal would be the last, and, if the five of clubs were not rthcoming by that time, the game would be lost and the dread entence would be carried into effect.

Deal after deal went on, and still the five of clubs did not show self. Even in the midst of his perturbation he heard and counted he strokes of a clock in the silent house. The clock struck three,

and n the act of deliberating which card he should play next, Ducie remarked to himself that it still wanted two hours to daybreak.

From minute to minute his perturbation increased. He did his best to maintain a calm front before his calm adversary. As he peered into those terrible eyes, he knew that he must expect no mercy if he failed in producing the magic card. Forgiveness and revenge were alike unknown to the inexorable being before him, who was the embodiment of law, serene and passionless, neither to be hurried nor hindered, keeping ever to the simple white line traced out for his footsteps from the beginning of the world, and as utterly regardless of human joy or human sorrow as of the grumbling of the earthquake or the fiery passion of the volcano.

Slowly but surely the game went on. Ducie's adversary marked off every deal with a hieroglyph on the huge slate by his side. Fifteen —ten—five—the number of deals diminished one by one, and still the magic card was not forthcoming. Ducie went on playing with the quiet courage of despair. Five—four—three—two—one. The last deal had come, but the five of clubs was still hidden in the pack. As he thought of the terrible fate before him his soul was utterly dismayed. Suddenly he heard a faint whisper in his ear: "Give me the Hara Diamond and I will save you." "It is yours," he replied in the same tone. In a fainter whisper than before came the words: "Feel up your sleeve for the five of clubs."

Ducie put his hand up his sleeve and drew forth the magic card. As he dashed it on the table, cards and image melted silently away, all but the great calm eyes, which seemed to recede slowly from him while gazing at him with an inexorable gentleness that awed him, and crushed out of him all expressions of joy at his escape.

He had been conscious all this time of being in his own room at the "Royal George," and, without being thoroughly awake, this consciousness was still upon him when he found himself alone. Was he really quite alone? he asked himself. Some voice had whispered in his ear only a minute ago, and a voice implied a bodily presence. But whose presence?

He would doubtless know before long, when this unknown being would come forth to claim the great Diamond.

Well, better part from the Diamond than be made a living mummy of, and be buried for five hundred years among dead kings and priests in the great Pyramid.

Was it Shakespeare who talked about "dusty death?" It did not matter. He had been saved from a dreadful fate, and a long peaceful sleep for one hundred and five hours, fifteen minutes, and ten seconds —neither more nor less—was needed to compensate him for the mental and bodily torture from which he had just escaped.

Even while this fancy was simmering in his brain, he was aware of a strange, subtle odour which seemed to rise from the floor in faint, cloud-like waves, rising and spreading till every nook and cranny of

the room was pervaded by it. It was a mist of perfume—a perfume far from unpleasant to inhale—heavy, yet pungent, odorous of the East, inclining to sleep and to visions of a passionless existence, undisturbed by all outward influences—such visions as must come o the strange beings whose most central thought is that of future absorption in the mystic godhead of the mighty Brahma.

Empires might change and die, the world might split asunder and chaos rule again, it mattered not to him. Only to rest, to lie there for ever, self-absorbed, indifferent to all mundane matters—that was the utmost that he craved.

The mist of perfume thickened, becoming from minute to minute denser and more penetrating. By this time it seemed to have permeated his whole being. It filled his lungs, it mingled with his blood, it saturated his brain ; it glowed in him, a slumberous heat, from head to foot. The shadowy past of his life, the real present of his surroundings, grouped themselves in his brain like blurred photographs, which it was impossible for him to regard with anything more than a vague and impersonal interest. Nothing seemed real to him save the noiseless involved working of his own mind, working in and out like a shuttle with a fantastic thread of many colours, and with self for ever as the central figure.

While his mind had been growing thus strangely active, his body had been slowly losing—or rather, suspending—its vitality. Slowly and imperceptibly his limbs had grown utterly powerless and inert, till now, if a kingdom had been offered him, he could not have raised hand or foot two inches from the bed. Not that he had any desire to move hand or foot, or head or tongue ; only to lie still for ever, thinking his own thoughts, weighing the universe in the balance of his own mind and finding it wanting. Grant him but that, ye powers of earth and air, and for the rest, the word "nihil" might be written, and all things come to an end.

Suddenly, through the mist of perfume that filled the room he saw, or seemed to see, a black and threatening figure rise from the floor close by his bedside.

"Surely," he thought to himself, "this must be the presence belonging to the voice that whispered in my ear as I was playing cards with the Memphian image. He has come to claim his pledge —he has come for the Hara Diamond."

To him, just now, the Hara Diamond was as valueless as a grain of sand. That black and threatening figure by his bedside might take it and welcome.

"Strange," he thought, "that the minds of men should ever grow to such trifles."

The power of despising others thoroughly, but without emotion, is one of the final products of pure intellect : and to that serene height he had now attained.

The black figure bent over him. In one hand it held a dagger.

Ducie felt no alarm. Such a human emotion as fear affected him not, nor quickened the equable pulses of his being.

As the face pertaining to the figure bent nearer to his own, he recognised it as the face of Cleon the mulatto. Even then he was not surprised. The mulatto made as though he would have struck Ducie to the heart, but stopped the dagger when it was within an inch of his breast. He passed his other hand across his forehead and seemed to stagger.

Was it possible that the powerful odour was affecting him as it had affected his victim? He hurriedly replaced his dagger in its sheath, and putting his hand to Ducie's neck, as if he knew instinctively that such a thing was there, he felt for the chain from which was suspended the sealskin pouch that held the Diamond. He had no difficulty in finding the chain, nor the sachet, nor the Diamond. He extracted the great flashing gem from its hiding-place, even as Ducie had extracted it a few weeks before from the head of the Indian idol. He held it up between his eye and the night-lamp and muttered a few guttural words to himself.

Then for the second time he passed his hand across his forehead and staggered. As if warned that he had not a moment to spare, he stuffed the Diamond into his mouth, gave a last scowl at the helpless figure before him and disappeared behind the curtains that fell round the head of the bed.

Ducie was left alone.

All that had just taken place had affected him no more than if he had witnessed it as a scene out of a play. The Great Diamond was gone, and not even a ripple disturbed the waveless serenity of his mind.

But the subtle odour that had filled the room was slowly fading out, and as it grew fainter, so did the strange spell that had held Ducie captive begin to lose its power. His thoughts lost their crystalline clearness, becoming blurred and unwieldy. They no longer arranged themselves in proper sequence. Some of them became so cumbersome that they had to be dropped and left behind, while those that were more nimble strayed so far ahead as to be almost beyond recall. Then the nimble ones had to come back and try to pick up the unwieldy ones, till they all became jumbled together and lost their individuality. Finally, sleep came to the rescue and laid her mantle softly over them, and for a little while all was peace.

*(To be continued.)*

## LADY HESTER STANHOPE.

SOME men and women whose names have made a mark on the page of the world's history have stepped out into the light from families and stations and social surroundings from whence we should have the least expected them to come. Others again have been to the manner born, and we have only to look to the race from which they sprang, or the associations amid which they were nurtured, to account for much that we find remarkable in them.

Lady Hester Stanhope was one of the latter; there was both eccentricity and talent in the families of each of her parents. The Stanhopes were a race that had often not done exactly as other men did, or thought exactly as other men thought; and her mother was the daughter of the great Earl of Chatham, the mighty minister who had once held the fate of England in his hand, who had been death-struck with the thunders of his eloquence upon his lips.

When little Hester was about four years old, the greatest misfortune happened to her that can, under God, happen to a girl—she lost her mother. Her father married again in course of time, and married a woman who turned out to be in everything most antagonistic to the strong character and decided nature of his daughter. Hester would submit to no training which emanated from her hated and despised stepmother, so she grew up very much in the way she chose. She had, of course, like all young ladies of rank of that day, to go through a certain amount of drill in the way of back-boards and such-like ponderous school machinery; but her peculiarly precocious mind broke away from all trammels, and she insisted on reading what she pleased, and darted the keen shafts of her young wit full in the faces of horrified governesses, and pastors and masters. It was quite useless to tell her what was and was not proper for the daughter of an earl to do or say: her ladyship was a law unto herself, and a very strong-handed, arbitrary law too.

Thus time went on till Hester had reached womanhood, and seldom had a more richly-developed flower of beauty been seen in the London Society of that day than hers when she began to appear at ball and rout. Her figure might have been a sculptor's ideal dream of a Juno, her lustrous eyes now flashed with intellect, now danced with fun. Her complexion is said to have been one of the loveliest ever beheld in its brilliancy of colouring, in its transparency of skin. No wonder that there were many worshippers and many declared suitors round her; but to not one of them would the divinity bow down a favouring ear.

In the midst of all her triumphs she had a worse and more bitter quarrel with her stepmother than she had ever had before, and

suddenly the star had vanished from the London horizon, and buried itself in the very depths of the country. Her grandmother, Lady Chatham, lived in an old mansion in Somersetshire, and thither she went. With the old lady she was a privileged pet, and she gave her one of the things which Hester Stanhope loved best in the world, and that was her own way in everything.

In Somersetshire Lady Hester remained for about three years, setting the whole quiet country neighbourhood on fire with her wit and beauty, making it ring with tales of her eccentricity, causing herself to be regarded as almost a fabulous being by the simple folk in the midst of whom she dwelt. Her horsemanship took by storm the hearts of the fox-hunting country squires, her toilettes filled with hopeless admiration and envy the breasts of the rustic belles, her free and easy manners struck dumb with bewildered astonishment the worthy dames of Somerset. They had read of earls' daughters to be sure, when now and then they had been lucky enough to get hold of a worn copy of a fashionable novel, to spell over in intervals between preserving and cordial-making; earls' daughters who seemed to be always walking a minuet and sweeping about in long brocaded trains; but here was an earl's daughter who went skipping over the meadows with ankles liberally displayed, who laughed as merrily as a milk-maid, who indulged in practical jokes as if she were a village schoolboy.

At the end of three years, when she was about twenty-eight, Lady Hester Stanhope flashed back again once more into the great world of the metropolis. She was no doubt by this time heartily tired of her life in the old country house, and moreover her uncle, William Pitt, whose favourite niece she had always been, asked her to come and live with him and become the mistress of his home. His household had long needed female supervision, and his drawing-room a lady to receive his guests. Hester was soon established in her uncle's house, and was blazing there as a queen of society.

This period was probably the happiest of Lady Hester Stanhope's life. A real, strong bond of mutual affection subsisted between her and her uncle, she stood at the head of one of the most splendid establishments in London, the world of rank, of literature, of art thronged around her and paid homage at her shrine. She held much power in her hand, for Pitt frequently listened to her advice and suggestions, and even allowed her to give away places and patronage at her will.

We catch glimpses of her standing in the full bloom of her imperial beauty in the brilliantly-lighted, gilded rooms, the centre of a crowd of ladies all aglitter with jewels and glistening silks, and gentlemen with lace ruffles and rapiers at their side; a crowd that treats the great minister's niece with almost royal honours. Her pretty mouth sends flying round her every minute little showers of witty fireworks, her eyes do deadly execution among the men.

She knows that though the women are paying her soft sweet compliments, there is cruel, bitter jealously lurking in their hearts, and this adds to the zest and piquancy of her ladyship's triumphs. Men of genius are there, and on these the delicately-chiselled lips smile graciously; and there is a touch of almost reverent tenderness in her manner as she speaks to them, for she knows that these are kings who are forced by the hard pressure of circumstances to come as beggars for patronage: kings that will reign in print long after the titled nobodies around them are forgotten. Pompous folly is there, talking a great deal of grand, inflated nonsense; and on it those same lips smile contemptuously behind the fan of rare carved ivory. Would-be lovers are there; and towards these, with a shrug of the white shoulders, is turned quickly and decisively the haughty lady's back. She has still, as in the days of her early girlhood, a feeling of strong rebellion against the ordinary fate of a young woman of quality to marry a man for the sake of sharing his title and his money, and spend a humdrum existence at his side in talking small scandal and airing fashionable costumes.

Lady Hester Stanhope's brain was so keen and so observant, that sometimes it caused her tongue to run away and to make sharper remarks on the follies and foibles of those about her than was exactly warranted by politeness. Thus it came to pass that she made some enemies who, however, in the days of her power, only growled under their breath.

But her royalty was not to be long-lived. When she had reigned in his house for about two years, her uncle, William Pitt, died. Then, in an instant, the Court which surrounded Lady Hester vanished like a many-tinted soap-bubble, and many of those who had cringed before her and flattered her started up and darted serpent tongues of detraction and calumny at her. In the mouths of these, who but yesterday had been hymning her praises, she was a heartless coquette, a woman eaten up by selfish ambition. In real grief at her uncle's loss, in violent disgust at such usage from the world, she turned once more from the gaudy scene of London life, and, leaving far behind her rouge, pearl powder, hoops, diamond buckles, fashionable small-talk, and false friends, retired into Wales, and lived alone for some time amid the grand solitude of the mountains.

From her retreat, however, she emerged at length. She was still very beautiful, though she was past thirty; hers was a style of beauty which wore well. She was endowed with a peculiarly brilliant conversational gift. The government had conferred on her a life pension of twelve hundred pounds a year, in consideration of her uncle's services to the State, which, joined to her own private fortune, made her rich in those days for a single woman. A natural wish again to shine and to be admired revived in her, and she re-appeared in London.

The great world received her back with plaudits, her enemies had

been dispersed or silenced, and she was re-seated on a social throne. She was, of course, not so courted and bowed before as she had been in Pitt's lifetime, but still, she held no mean sway.

And now a sun rose in her life's story that had never shone on her before; a sun, the radiance of which brought out all the softer and more delicate perfume of the flowers of her womanhood. She was in love for the first and only time, and she loved with all the most deep, mature love of woman; loved as only such strong natures as hers can love, as it is only given to few to love here on earth; loved with a love in which was her whole heart and soul. The man she loved gave back her love in full, and was well worthy of such a passion. England has written his name as a hero, and there is many a tear-stain round it. He was a soldier, and he had real military genius, for he was Sir John Moore.

If Moore had lived, if that page which tells of the day of glorious defeat at Corunna had never been written in history, the story of Hester Stanhope would have been a very different one from what it is. It would have been the story of a noble, devoted wife, and tender, loving mother. The eccentricities of her disposition would have been kept in the background by the firm influence of a husband who would have known how to rule her, because he possessed the golden key to her heart. We should, perhaps, have had to tell of her deeds of heroism done at her soldier's side; we should, perhaps, have had to enroll her name among the names of the mothers of great men. She would, most likely, have developed fair blossoms of womanly self-sacrifice and fortitude.

But it was decreed that such things should not be. Sir John Moore was still kneeling at Lady Hester Stanhope's feet, in the first raptures of an accepted lover, when he was called to take the chief command of the British army in Spain. Was there no boding throb at her heart, as she clung to him at parting, which made her white arms hold him the closer?

For awhile Lady Hester trod the paths of common life with feet that kept time to martial music, the music that would herald her hero's triumphant return. Then came across the sea the news which brought the nation such a glorious sorrow; the news which gave the fatal blow to Hester Stanhope's earthly happiness. We all know the story of that death-bed on a foreign battle-field, but few perhaps know that Hester Stanhope's name was almost the last word on Sir John Moore's lips.

This loss of her promised husband is probably the key to much that is strange and unlovable in Lady Hester Stanhope's latter life. She did not melt into a naiad of perennial tears, as many a weaker woman in her sad position would have done; but not the less did the wound bleed inwardly, while over it her character hardened and grew rough and prickly. A great, unutterable nausea came upon her of modern London, with all its mixture of hollow gilding and painted

vice. An irresistible longing seized her to break away from all social trammels. From her childhood she had loved to read and dream of the far East, with all its romance and tales of wondrous magic; with its rich, languid perfumes, and gardens carpeted with many-tinted flowers, and thither she resolved to go.

In those days it was an almost unheard-of thing for a single woman of rank to start on a long foreign journey on her own account, and Society held up its hands very high indeed at such a proceeding; but Lady Hester went her own way without even once looking back. She took with her several servants, a companion called Miss Williams, a doctor called Meryon, started for Constantinople, and in course of time arrived there.

The Turkish capital was soon resounding from end to end with stories of the rich and, as was said, rather crazy Englishwoman. One of these told how her ladyship one day took it into her head that she should like to pay a visit to a Turkish man of war. The commander of the vessel which she especially desired to favour with her presence sent a vehement, and not too courteous refusal to her request that she might come on board his ship. "No woman," he said, "had ever trodden his deck, and he was not at all inclined to make an exception in favour of a mad English lady."

In due course, the ungallant reply was delivered to Lady Hester; she shrugged her well-sloped shoulders, smiled significantly, and kept silence.

Not long after that, the old sea bear, who had refused to bow before the sovereign will of beauty, was informed one morning that a foreign military officer of high rank was waiting in a boat alongside his ship, begging to be allowed to pay his respects to him and to be shown over the vessel. Now there was nothing the Turkish commander liked better than acting as cicerone in his own vessel to distinguished notabilities, and the stranger was welcomed on board with all honours. From bow to stern the Commandant conducted his visitor, leading him into the very sanctuary of his own cabin itself. The leave-takings were over, the stranger sat once more in his own boat; then suddenly the general's cocked hat and feather which he wore was tipped off into the sea, and the Turk, to his unspeakable astonishment and horror, beheld gazing at him, with a look of saucy triumph in the sparkling eyes, a fairer face than any which peeped through the lattices of his own seraglio: the crazy Englishwoman had had her way at last.

From Constantinople Lady Hester Stanhope travelled on to Syria, and there, after a time, settled down permanently in a villa a few miles from Sidon. Here she lived out the rest of her life, and never again returned to Europe for so much as a short visit. She was looked up to with considerable reverence by the natives; partly on account of the large establishment she kept causing her to be regarded as a sort of princess; partly from her frequent dealings with those who

professed magic arts, making her an object of superstitious fear; partly from her keenness of wit, which taught her to gain influence over the simple people round her. Certain it is that she had no slight power in Syria, and that she generally used it for good ends.

Lady Hester Stanhope grew more and more eccentric in both conduct and character as the years went on. She discarded entirely all female dress, and always wore the costume of an Eastern man. She had so much intercourse with Eastern magicians and astrologers that at length she seems to have grown herself to believe in many of their supernatural powers, and many of their superstitions. She took a violent dislike to her own sex, and was waited on almost exclusively by male attendants, and would seldom admit a woman into her presence. Luckless Dr. Meryon had once the audacity, when he paid a visit to England, to return with a wife; but the poor lady was soon sent back again in a most summary manner. Her temper became most imperious and despotic, and her moments of passion were most excessive and unbridled. It was no unusual thing for every domestic in the villa to be blown out of it by one of these explosions.

Lady Hester Stanhope always preserved her faith in the Christian religion. She was a constant reader of the Bible; indeed, in the latter years of her life, she is said to have read no other book besides it. Many of her religious beliefs were, however, of a singular kind. She believed in the immediate advent of the Messiah, and that she herself should hold a prominent place in His kingdom. One day a guest, who was visiting her, remarked on the beauty of two Arab horses that stood side by side in her stable, and evidently received special care and attention. She replied, in a quite matter-of-fact tone, that these were the two horses she was keeping for Christ and herself to ride on when they made their public entry into Jerusalem.

In spite of her arbitrary will, Lady Hester Stanhope was an exceedingly bad manager of her own household; her servants pillaged her on every side, and, in consequence, her means grew more and more straitened. She continued, however, to use a large hospitality, and strangers, more especially if they came from England, were most freely and generously welcomed by her. The reception of one great English traveller by her stands out before us in a very distinct picture.

The villa wears its gala dress to-day; there are costly rugs and carpets spread on all floors and divans, the servants are in rich costumes; evidently a guest that is in no mean estimation with the mistress of the house is expected. By-and-by arrives a man with a keen, thoughtful, sunburnt face; he is introduced into a vast apartment, scantily furnished according to Eastern fashion, and is left standing alone.

He is well used to all sorts of strange situations in his wanderings; still, he does not quite know what to make of it as the minutes glide

on and no hostess appears. He remains near the door in some perplexity; suddenly he perceives that what looks like a long, white bundle lying on a divan at the further end of the large room is stirring. Slowly a figure rises and comes towards him. It is all white: white turban, transparently-white face, white garments. The traveller half thinks that he has found his way by mistake into some enchanter's abode, or that a trick is being played off upon him. Before, however, he has had time to put into shape his ideas, he is addressed in English by a lady-like woman's voice, and with as much courtesy as if he were in Buckingham Palace, and is quickly entangled in such a bright, many-tinted web of conversation that he is kept enthralled even till the shades of night have fallen. The author of "Eothen" has had his experience of what a visit to Lady Hester Stanhope is like.

During the last years of her life Lady Hester Stanhope suffered much from ill-health. She grew feebler and feebler in body, but the keen intelligence and dauntless spirit never failed or wavered. She would not grow old, though years were beginning to tell upon her.

One day, in the summer of 1839, some English visitors came early to the villa. They dismounted, they entered, but nowhere could they find a living human being: they were struck by a look of disorder everywhere. At length, in an inner apartment, they found the body of Lady Hester Stanhope lying cold and still. She had died in the night, and her servants had left the villa, each carrying off some piece of prey. Her countrymen laid her quietly to rest in the sunny garden of the villa.

ALICE KING.

## VOICES.

THE wind's low whisper in the grass,
And louder murmur on the air;
And in my heart a silent voice,
And silent echoes there.

Could I but surely know and feel
What precious thing the low wind saith,
What blessed promise in my heart
That still voice whispereth—

Then should I no more doubt and fear,
As those that have no living stay,
For God's own Presence, shining clear,
Would melt these mists away.

GEORGE COTTERELL.

# A PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE.

By F. M. F. Skene.

IF science has of late years done much to elucidate many of the mysteries which surround us in the visible universe, there is no doubt that it has at the same time unearthed, from what may have been a merciful obscurity, various inexplicable phenomena, calculated to baffle the most acute intelligence that might seek to grapple with them.

Under this head may be classed the hypnotism—thought transference and duplex personality, and other singular problems of human consciousness—with which scientific men both in France and England are at present so largely occupied.

Facts in the histories of individuals which can throw any light on these perplexing questions have an intrinsic value—quite apart from any purely romantic interest they may possess—and the remarkable experience we are about to relate, touches also on that ancient and more familiar mystery which has shown in all ages how trifles, light as air, may become the instrument of portentous tragedies, wrecking helpless lives in irremediable fatality.

A young man was standing one November morning on the doorstep of his old country home in the north of England, waiting for his horse to be brought round. He was clad in the orthodox attire for a day's hunting, and seemed the very embodiment of health and strength, whilst his fair hair and clear complexion gave him a more youthful appearance than his five-and-twenty years might have warranted.

Presently his hunter, a thorough-bred bay, was brought to the door, but just as Harry Grantham was about to spring into the saddle, his mother's maid came running down the steps and told him that her mistress was awake, and wished to see him for a moment before he went out.

He turned at once and ran lightly up the oak staircase, which led to Lady Grantham's room—she owed her title to the fact that her husband, long since dead, had been a K.C.B.

The young man gave a quick knock at the door, then opened it gently and went in. His mother was sitting up in bed wrapped in a crimson shawl, with a look of eagerness and anxiety on her still beautiful face; age had not marred the symmetry of her fine features or dimmed the brightness of her eyes, and the glance of passionate fondness which she cast on her son was met by one from him almost equally tender.

"Forgive me for delaying you, dear Harry," she said, "but I could

not resist a strange, unaccountable longing to see you this morning before you left home. You will not let it be late to-night before you come back to me?" and she placed her arms round her son and strained him to her heart.

"Oh no, dear mother," he answered, as she released him. "It gets so soon dark now that it is impossible to go on very long in the afternoon."

"And now you are going to the hunt breakfast at Ringwood Hall, are you not?"

"Yes. There will be a great gathering there to-day, for it is quite the perfection of a hunting morning—mild and grey with a moist south wind—the scent will be capital; and Mr. Vivian manages the whole affair admirably; he is the best M. F. H. we have ever had. I wish you could see what a picturesque sight it is when we are all assembled on the lawn before starting."

"May Vivian goes with you, I conclude," said Lady Grantham, somewhat wistfully.

The colour rose in the young man's face. "Yes, certainly," he answered. "She never misses the chance of a good gallop across country. She is simply splendid on horseback, and rides more fearlessly than half the men in the field."

"I have never been able to understand how a girl so tender-hearted and sensitive as I know May Vivian to be, can bear to be present at the cruel business of breaking up the fox, as you term it." Lady Grantham was instinctively prolonging the conversation from a strange unwillingness to let her son pass out of her sight.

"But she never is present, mother," he said vehemently. "She has declared often that nothing would induce her to be in at the death. She cannot endure even to hear of wounds or hurts of any kind. Why, I have seen her grow white as snow at the sight of a cut finger. She is just the sweetest, most delicate-minded girl in the world." His face glowed with enthusiasm as he spoke.

"Ah, my boy," said Lady Grantham sadly, "it is plain enough how very dear she is to you."

"Well, mother," he returned, with a certain constraint, "I will not deny it, for I have no secrets from you; but, at the same time, it is not a subject on which I can ever speak again. I saw very clearly, when I was last at the Hall, that John Elrington has won that treasure, and no one else has the ghost of a chance."

"Sir John Elrington is a very fine-looking man," said Lady Grantham, "and I have always heard that he is clever, and likely to make his mark in the world; but, Harry, I can never think that anyone deserves happiness so much as my darling son."

He only answered by stooping down to kiss her tenderly on the forehead, and then struggling to shake off the gloom which had suddenly darkened his bright young face, he took leave of her cheerfully, and ran down the wide stairs to mount his horse.

Lady Grantham listened to his footsteps as long as they could be heard; then, with a quick impulse, she sprang from her bed, wrapping her shawl round her, and, going to the window, flung it wide open and leant out, so that she could see him in his saddle just turning from the door. He heard the sound of the opening window, and looking up with the clear blue eyes, which were the light of life to her, he doffed his hat in a smiling salute and cantered away. She watched him with a straining gaze till he passed altogether from her sight, and then, as she turned back into the room, she said—unconscious, apparently, that she was speaking aloud into the silence—"*The only son of his mother, and she was a widow.*"

## II.

Harry Grantham had said truly that the gathering on the lawn of Ringwood Hall, after the hunt breakfast, was a striking spectacle. Most of the gentlemen resident in the county were there, mounted on well-groomed horses; and Mr. Vivian, the master of the fine pack of hounds, held back with difficulty in their impatience to be off, was a conspicuous figure in his stalwart old age, with Sir John Elrington, a remarkably handsome man, on one side of him and his young daughter, May, on the other.

She was undoubtedly the fairest sight in all that gay assemblage, though not by any means the only lady who was there, in irreproachable costume, to follow the hounds. Her charming face was bright and joyous, as if her happy youth could never know a cloud, and her light, graceful figure was shown to advantage, poised on the back of a splendid horse, the strongest and fleetest in her father's stables.

Harry Grantham could not look on that beautiful picture without a pang, which stung him into a fierce desire to escape at least from the sight of John Elrington taking his place at her side as if by inalienable right, and when the signal was given for a general move, the young man rode hurriedly forward alone in advance of all the others. He kept that solitary position steadily without once looking back, even after a fox had been found and the hounds were in full cry in pursuit of it. The zest had been taken from his anticipated pleasure that day, and he galloped on mechanically, only anxious to keep well in front, so as to avoid having to speak to any acquaintance at a moment when his intense jealousy of one individual made him feel as if he held the whole human race in detestation.

Presently Harry became aware that one of his spurs had got loosened so that it was beating against his horse's side, and rendering the animal almost unmanageable. He was still well ahead of the main body of the field, and he believed he would have time to dismount and set the matter right before any of them came up with him. A high hedge was facing him when he arrived at this decision, over which he leaped at once and landed in a field where a farm

labourer was leisurely hoeing the ground in preparation for a winter's crop. Harry sprang off his half-frantic steed, and called out to the man :

"Here! hold my horse, will you, while I fasten my spur?"

He came forward at once, and led the animal away to a little distance, where he soon succeeded in quieting its excitement as the cause of irritation was removed.

Meanwhile, Harry, stooping down under the hedge, was entirely absorbed in the effort to secure his spur in its proper place as quickly as possible, so that for the moment he saw and heard nothing of what was passing round him.

Suddenly, May Vivian, whose exceptionally fleet horse had brought her foremost of all the field to that point, came right over the hedge in a flying leap at the very spot where Harry Grantham was bent down, with hands and eyes fully occupied. Her horse knocked him flat on the ground without her seeing him; if she was even mechanically conscious of any momentary obstruction it only made her touch the animal with her riding-whip to urge him onwards, and as it sped away its iron-shod hoof struck the prostrate young man a violent blow on the head, and then it bounded onwards with a swiftness which soon bore its rider over hedges and ditches, far out of sight.

The light-hearted girl flew along in keen enjoyment of the rapid motion and of the fresh air blowing strongly in her radiant face, absolutely unaware that she had passed over any obstacle whatever. From the moment she left home her high-mettled horse had risen lightly at every gate or hedge in her path, bearing her over it like a flying bird, and, if occasionally his winged-feet spurned a bush or a little hillock of earth in his rapid course, it did not so much as attract her attention at all.

Thus it was, that in one moment—one brief, unnoticed moment—the gentle, sensitive young girl had become an unconscious murderess, and in a fleeting, scarce measurable space of time, a tragedy had been enacted, which was to steep joyous human lives in undying pain.

Perhaps of all those struck by the grim fatality as by a lightning flash, the principal victim was in truth the one on whom it had fallen with a certain unseen beneficence. Harry Grantham had received his death blow with a suddenness which left him no time for regret or fear—he passed out of a life which almost up to that day had been marked solely by unalloyed brightness and enjoyment. He was gone in his unsullied youth, and who shall say that he was not taken from the evil to come? But what of the desolate mother, whose idol he had been? What of the tender-hearted girl who must for ever be branded with the murderous act which had destroyed his life? What of those who loved her and could never more escape the knowledge of her dire calamity?

III.

Mr. Vivian had been following his daughter as quickly as he could, with her stately lover at his side; and it was only the special fleetness of her horse which had borne her to some distance in advance of them. In a very few minutes he and Sir John Elrington leapt the hedge within half-a-dozen yards of the spot where Harry Grantham lay motionless, face downwards, on the earth.

The farm labourer, who had witnessed the whole terrible catastrophe, had already fastened the riderless horse to a tree, and was rushing towards the inanimate form when the two gentlemen made their appearance close to him. He knew Mr. Vivian, and had also recognised his daughter; and flinging up his arms he exclaimed, with no softening of the dreadful truth:

"Oh, sir, she has killed him! She has killed poor Mr. Grantham! I saw her do it."

"What? who?" exclaimed Mr. Vivian, bewildered; but then his eyes fell on the prostrate figure stretched out almost at his feet. He dismounted hastily, while already John Elrington had flung himself out of his saddle and was kneeling beside the young man, trying to raise him from the ground. Mr. Vivian quickly joined him, and as they lifted the lifeless head a ghastly wound on the temple showed that death must have been instantaneous.

"Good heavens! how dreadful!" exclaimed Mr. Vivian, almost letting the body fall from his arms in his utter dismay. "It is Harry Grantham! What—what did you say?" he added, turning to the labourer. "Did I hear you declare he had been killed?"

"Yes, sir; by the young lady—by Miss Vivian. I saw it all. Poor Mr. Grantham was stooping down under the hedge, fastening his spur while I held his horse, when the lady came flying over it on her big black horse, and knocked him clean down on the earth. But the lady was off like a shot, and never found out what she had done."

"God grant she never may!" said Mr. Vivian hoarsely, as he rose up slowly, his face livid with horror and pain. "It would simply annihilate her, my poor, gentle girl, if she ever knew it. I would move heaven and earth to keep such an awful knowledge from her."

"It must be kept from her, at any cost," said Elrington vehemently. "She must never know it, happen what may!"

Other horsemen had by this time reached the field, and although some, in the excitement of the chase, held on their way without stopping, several others rode up to Mr. Vivian to ask what had happened, and to know if they could be of any use. Amongst these was the local physician, who at once set himself to examine the body. A very brief survey was sufficient: he laid the lifeless form gently on the ground and stood up.

"There is nothing whatever to be done," he said. "The skull is shattered: he must have died instantly."

A few hours later all necessary arrangements had been made. The body was conveyed to the nearest inn to await an inquest on the following day; and the doctor undertook to break the direful tidings to Lady Grantham, whose medical attendant he was.

While Mr. Vivian and those cognisant of the tragedy had been thus occupied, the other members of the hunt, among whom was his daughter May, had continued their sport in total ignorance of all that had occurred. Finally, in the dusk of the afternoon, she returned slowly to Ringwood Hall, and found, as she expected, that her father had come home some hours previously.

Mr. Vivian had, in the meantime, taken counsel with his wife and with John Elrington, who had made no secret to the parents of his hope that their beautiful daughter would become his wife, and they agreed that nothing was to be said to May of the dreadful calamity, till they had all retired for the night. Then her mother was to tell her as gently as possible that there had been a sad accident, which had cost Harry Grantham his life, but without giving her any details, and afterwards every effort was to be made to prevent her from ever learning her own terrible share in the fatality—for they well knew that no one was less able than their peculiarly sensitive daughter to endure such a knowledge.

This conviction nerved Mrs. Vivian to tell her very calmly and soberly that Harry Grantham had sustained an accident in the hunting field which had proved fatal, but she entered into no particulars, and May naturally concluded that he had been thrown by his own horse and hopelessly injured so that death had quickly followed.

She was, of course, very much shocked and grieved at the sudden perishing of a young man whom she had seen only that morning in full health and vigour, but there was no personal sense of loss to her in the news. Harry Grantham was nothing to her but a mere acquaintance, and she had hardly been even aware of his admiration for herself; in fact, her whole heart and soul were absorbed in the deep love she bore to John Elrington, who was, she knew, to be her future husband; he had left her in no doubt as to his feelings towards her, and their marriage had only not been explicitly arranged because her parents had begged Sir John to wait till their dear child was somewhat older.

May talked sadly for a little time of the painful news her mother had brought her, and especially reverted, with much sympathy, to Lady Grantham, who was well known to be absolutely wrapped up in her only son; but the Vivians had merely a slight acquaintance with her, as she had lived almost entirely on the Continent till a short time previously, and since then had led a very retired life.

Mrs. Vivian was able, therefore, to leave her daughter comparatively calm and undisturbed when she bade her good-night, and went

away hoping, as the girl was thoroughly tired out after her long ride, that she would soon be fast asleep.

In this idea, however, the lady proved to have been singularly mistaken. Never in all her happy young life had May Vivian passed such a night as that which followed. Her slumbers had always been like those of a child, perfectly peaceful and dreamless; and on this occasion she closed her eyes as usual so soon as her head was laid upon the pillow; but there fell upon her then a strange, indefinite sense of horror, which haunted her under many confused images, each more painful than the last, through all the hours of darkness. She could never afterwards fully recall what these terrible visions had been, only she knew that Lady Grantham, bearing an awful aspect of suffering, was the centre of them all. Harry Grantham she did not see, but the consciousness of some dread calamity to him reflected in his mother's agony was present with her throughout.

When at last the morning light released May from the bondage of this mysterious terror, and she awoke shaken and unrefreshed—the traces of what she had endured were plainly visible on her young face usually so bright and beautiful. She was deadly pale; her eyes red and swollen with the tears she had shed unconsciously in her sleep; and she could not repress the fits of shuddering which seized upon her every few minutes, even when she went down to the room where the family were assembled for breakfast.

John Elrington was staying in the house, and he uttered an exclamation of dismay when he saw her changed appearance—the more startling to him because Mrs. Vivian had assured him that May had heard the sad news, so far as it had been told her, with perfect composure, unruffled by the slightest emotion.

In answer to the anxious inquiries as to her health—looking so ill as she did, May only replied that she was quite well, but that she had had a bad night and been disturbed by unpleasant dreams. Then she sat down in silence at the breakfast-table, where, however, it was evident that she did not even attempt to eat anything. When they all rose up, Elrington drew Mrs. Vivian into the library, allowing her to see clearly that he was in a state of great perturbation of mind.

"Surely May must have been much more attached to Harry Grantham than you knew," he exclaimed anxiously. "She looks as if she had been breaking her heart over him all night. Since she does not know that she had any share in his death; it can only be grief for the loss to herself which is affecting her so deeply."

"No; you are quite mistaken, Sir John," said Mrs. Vivian. I know very well to whom my dear child's affections are exclusively given, as you will learn from her own lips some day. She never cared in the very least for Harry Grantham; but she has an intensely sympathetic nature, and she always feels for the sufferings of others to a very unusual extent."

Sir John seemed satisfied, and he left her to join Mr. Vivian, with

whom he was going to attend the inquest appointed to take place at noon that day. They were to be the principal witnesses along with the farm labourer who had actually been present when the terrible event had occurred. Mr. Vivian had succeeded in persuading the coroner not to summon his unfortunate young daughter to attend; he had seen him privately at an earlier hour and explained to him that she was entirely ignorant of the real circumstances of the case, and could only testify to the fact that she had made her horse leap all the hedges she had encountered that day without noticing any one in particular.

The room where the Coroner and his jury sat was crowded by nearly all the gentlemen who had been out with the hounds on that disastrous day, while the doctor and Lady Grantham's solicitors were also present.

The proceedings were soon over, for the facts were unmistakably clear, and the jury could only bring in a verdict of "death by misadventure." When this had been done, Mr. Vivian turned round and addressed the large assemblage of his friends and neighbours who filled the room. He spoke with a certain sad dignity of the cruel misfortune which had befallen his innocent child, and rendered her the instrument of death to the fine young man whose lifeless body they had just seen. It had been possible as yet, he said, to conceal the truth from her quite effectually, and it was his most anxious desire that she should never in any way become aware of her own sad share in the calamity—as such a fatal knowledge would simply be worse than death to her. All newspapers containing an account of the inquest would be sedulously kept from her, and he appealed to the friends who surrounded him to do all in their power to prevent any rumour of the real facts being brought to her. It need hardly be said that his petition was met with the utmost sympathy, and the most earnest assurances given to him that his wishes would be carefully carried out.

Later in the day Mr. and Mrs. Vivian went to Lady Grantham's house, anxiously desiring to see her, if possible, and tell her of their deep distress at their poor child's unconscious agency in her irreparable misfortune; but they could not obtain access to her. She was alone with her dead. She had locked herself into the room where her lifeless treasure lay, and refused to quit, even for a moment, the disfigured form which was all that remained to her of her life's lost happiness, so long as she could hold it back from the expectant grave.

## IV.

It had been arranged by the Vivians before the occurrence of the calamity which weighed so heavily upon their house, that they should winter in the Riviera, as their son Edward, their only other child, was in a very delicate state of health. He was a year or two

younger than May, and was a beautiful boy, but he had never been strong, and a few months previously, symptoms of consumption had set in so decidedly that the doctors declared another winter in England would be fatal to him.

It had originally been settled that May was to go to Mentone with her parents, and that Elrington was to follow and enter on a formal engagement with her, which could be openly announced, so that the wedding might take place immediately on their return home in the early summer.

After the funeral of Harry Grantham, however, Sir John went to Mr. and Mrs. Vivian to propose that a different plan should be adopted.

He was passionately attached to May, but he was a man of very jealous temperament, and as she continued to be somewhat silent and abstracted, he could not altogether divest himself of the idea that she must have cared more for Harry Grantham than she had perhaps been aware of herself, and that if the truth respecting his death ever became known to her it might seriously interfere with their happiness when she should be his wife. He therefore suggested to her father and mother that they should not only allow the engagement to be ratified at once, but that the marriage itself should take place before they left home, so that he might, without delay, carry his young bride away from the neighbourhood which had become dangerous to her peace of mind, and place her in his own distant home where the recent tragedy could never be known. He promised if they would agree to this plan that he would bring May out to the Riviera in the early spring, so that she might help them to tend her brother in his failing health.

The Vivians willingly consented—they felt that, under the circumstances, it would be a kind and wise arrangement for their daughter, and they gave Elrington free leave to settle matters with her that same day, as he desired. He went away at once, full of hope and satisfaction, to seek for her.

The air was soft and mild that afternoon, and as Sir John was told by the butler that Miss Vivian was out walking in the grounds, he went quickly towards a spot which he knew to be her favourite haunt. It was a sheltered seat placed under the spreading branches of a magnificent cedar tree; and there, as he expected, he found her resting quietly in the complete solitude it afforded. She was leaning back, apparently in deep thought, for her book lay unopened on her knee.

As Elrington's footstep sounded close to her she looked up, and any doubt he might have had as to her feelings towards him ought to have been completely dispelled by the unmistakable glow of pleasure which brightened her sweet face at sight of him.

He sat down by her side and speedily entered on the subject that lay so near his heart; but as our object in this record is simply to

describe a strange psychological experience, we will leave John Elrington's version of the deathless old love story to our readers' imagination.

His success was complete. May Vivian was a delicate-minded maiden, but she was also truthful and open as the day; and since she did, in fact, love Sir John most heartily and faithfully, she owned to him that it was so with a very winning simplicity.

Then he told her of his great desire that their marriage should take place before the family left Ringwood Hall for the Riviera, and begged her to consent to this plan, assuring her at the same time that her parents had already willingly agreed to it.

May turned towards him with such an eloquent glance of happy acquiescence that it was plain she was ready to link her fate to his own so soon as he pleased, and her lips parted to give him the glad consent he desired.

The words were not spoken, however. Suddenly, in that same instant, a strange dark shadow seemed to pass over her face, quenching all its sunny brightness, while her eyes dilated with a look of horror unspeakable. For a few seconds she remained silent, and seemed to be listening to some sound unheard by Elrington, then a strong fit of shuddering shook her slight frame; with a violent effort she tore her hand out of her lover's grasp and started to her feet as if to fly from him, exclaiming:

"Oh, no—no—I cannot—I cannot! You must leave me—you must give me up! I can never go away into happiness with that voice ringing in my ears."

Elrington was startled beyond measure, and he caught her by the arm as she seemed just about to dart away from the spot.

"May, what on earth do you mean?" he exclaimed; "are you going to refuse me after owning that you love me?"

She writhed in his hold, and stretched out her hands as if to thrust him from her.

"Let me go—let me go!" she cried, "how can you ask me to come and be your happy wife with that mournful, cruel reproach wailing out to me in such piteous tones? do you not hear the voice and the words it utters? '*The only son of his mother, and she was a widow.*'"

"I hear nothing," said Elrington, somewhat sternly; "of whom are you speaking?"

"Of her—the desolate mother—lying in her darkened room—her very heart buried with him in his untimely grave."

"You mean Harry Grantham's mother?" said Sir John, rising to his feet, and fixing his eyes with a piercing gaze on the girl's death-like face. The jealous suspicions which had possessed him more or less since Grantham's death returned upon him in full force, and he grasped May's hands tightly while he spoke in a fierce, determined tone.

"Miss Vivian, we must understand each other. Do you mean to tell me that for some reason connected with Harry Grantham you refuse to be my wife? or is it only," he added, his voice softening, "that you object to so speedy a marriage as I desired? Are you willing to come to me a little later?"

"Oh, no—no!" she exclaimed, while her horror-stricken eyes seemed still to be gazing on some dreadful vision. "I can never come to you to be happy—let me go—it is cruel to hold me, you must leave me for ever."

She struggled to escape from him, and he released her angrily, saying as he flung her hands from him:

"Be it as you will, but you need not have fooled me, I think, by telling me that you loved me. It was a very useless lie, since it was to be so quickly refuted."

The young girl gave one look of anguish into his face, and then turned and fled from him towards the house, as if some unseen power were driving her away.

Sir John Elrington's resentment was not unnaturally bitter and deep. His pride was wounded to the quick; his strong love for the girl flung back upon himself, and his jealous temperament roused to a passionate extent—he came to the conclusion that May Vivian had been persuaded by her parents to accept him, but that her heart had really been given to Harry Grantham, and had revolted against the idea of any other marriage when it came to the point.

He did not hesitate for a moment as to his course. He walked straight back to Ringwood Hall and asked to see Mr. Vivian. He found him and his wife in the library together, and he at once stated in a few cold, trenchant words that their daughter had definitely and finally refused him, and that she had left him in no doubt she did so because she had been attached and probably engaged to Harry Grantham, and could not endure that any other should take his place.

Mr. Vivian looked perfectly bewildered at this speech, but Mrs. Vivian rose from her seat in great agitation.

"Sir John," she exclaimed, "there must be some serious mistake. It is not true that May had any affection for Harry Grantham. He admired her, I know, and I remember that you noticed it, but I do not think she was aware of it herself, and certainly she never cared for him in the smallest degree; she could not, indeed, for I know well that she loved you, and you only."

"Such may have been your impression," answered Sir John, with freezing politeness, "but it has been completely refuted by her own words."

"No, it is you who are mistaken," said Mrs. Vivian impetuously. "I cannot allow my poor child's happiness to be wrecked by some misunderstanding. Let me go to her and ascertain what her real meaning has been. You will wait here till I return?"

"Certainly," said Sir John, "if you can prove that there has been

any mistake I shall of course be deeply thankful, but I do not think you will find that Miss Vivian can easily give any different explanation of her words, from the very explicit statement she made to me."

Mrs. Vivian left the room, and Elrington paced to and fro, refusing Mr. Vivian's request that he would sit down, till her return. She came back at last looking greatly perplexed and troubled.

"May's state is very mysterious," she said. "I cannot understand it. I am quite as certain as I was before that Harry Grantham was literally nothing to her, and that she does love you, Sir John, deeply and devotedly; but she seems lost in some strange horror and misery, and she is possessed by a vision of the widowed mother in her agony of desolation."

"Do you think it is possible that she can in some way have learned the truth as to her having been the cause of his death?" asked Mr. Vivian.

"No, I am quite sure she is still in absolute ignorance of the fact," answered Mrs. Vivian. "Everyone has been most careful in never alluding to it, and when she casually mentioned his sad accident, only this morning, I saw she had not the slightest suspicion of it. I can only so far account for her present condition by supposing that her extraordinary sensitiveness makes her feel as if it would be almost cruel and heartless in her to be very happy when poor Lady Grantham is so lonely and miserable."

"A very hyper-sensitiveness, certainly," said Sir John bitterly; "and is it to go on for the rest of her life with its present results?"

"No, indeed," said Mrs. Vivian. "I hope and believe it is a mere passing fancy. John, let me ask you to have a little patience with my poor May—I know she is dear to you."

"She has been so, indeed, more than I can say. She is the only woman I have ever wished to make my wife."

"Then let us wait till the time originally thought of for your marriage—it is plain that the speedy wedding you suggested cannot now take place; but we will bring May with us to Mentone, and if you will join us there as was first arranged I think you will find that all the sad associations of this neighbourhood will have passed from her mind, and that she will be only too glad to welcome you back and agree to your wishes."

It was a relief to Elrington to agree to this plan, and so it was settled. They were all alike of opinion that Sir John and May had better not meet for the present, and he decided, therefore, to leave England at once, while the Vivians were to hasten their departure and be ready to receive him at Mentone in the course of a very few weeks.

## V.

May Vivian's distress when she heard of her lover's departure was quite unmistakable. She made, in fact, no effort to conceal it, and

she only regained her composure on her mother's assurance that she would see him again in a very short time in the Riviera.

The Vivians had soon reason to be very thankful that they were able to leave England without further delay, for their young son began to suffer much from the cold and damp weather, and it was evident that if he were not at once removed to a warmer climate his malady would make fatal progress. Preparations for their journey were therefore made as quickly as possible; May helping in the arrangements with manifest delight and admitting quite openly that she was longing with eager impatience for the day which should see them fairly on their way to Mentone and John Elrington.

That day came; the carriage was at the door to convey them to the station—Edward had already been placed in it wrapped in furs, and May with her father and mother stood on the steps ready to seat themselves beside him—they only paused a moment to take leave of Miss Berkeley, Mrs. Vivian's sister, who had been staying with them for a short visit before their departure and was to return to her own home in London so soon as they were gone. The farewells were over; Mrs. Vivian entered the carriage and sat down; her husband hastily followed and called out to his daughter to follow quickly. She was standing at the top of the short flight of steps which led from the door, and at once obeyed him by commencing rapidly to descend them.

Suddenly she stopped short with one foot on the lowest step, as if transfixed—rigid and immovable, save for a strong fit of shuddering which shook her from head to foot, at the same instant a deathlike pallor spread over her face, her eyes opened wide in a gaze of indescribable horror; then a wild cry broke from her trembling lips and she uttered almost the same strange words which had driven Elrington from her.

"Oh, I cannot—I cannot! Shall I go away to sunshine and happiness while she sits there in her dark, cruel solitude, mourning for him—*the only son of his mother, and she a widow?*"

May turned and ran quickly up the steps to the door as if about to re-enter the house, but her mother sprang hastily from the carriage and hurried forward to intercept her.

"May! do not be so capricious," she said; "this is no time to give way to hysterics. You must come into the carriage at once and not cause any foolish delay."

"No—no!" she exclaimed in a tone of anguish, while she struggled to push past her mother and get into the house. "I cannot go with you—not now or ever—I must stay here under the shadow of this awful misery."

"You will do nothing of the kind," said Mr. Vivian, coming angrily up the steps. "I think you have taken leave of your senses, child; but I'll stand no more nonsense, you shall come with me this moment."

And he was about to lay hold of her when she broke frantically away from him and darting through the open door rushed up the stairs to her own room.

"Is the girl mad?" said Mr. Vivian fiercely. "Here, let me pass —I'll fetch her back if I have to use main force."

"Oh! do not let us be rough with her," said Mrs. Vivian, half weeping; "the poor child is nervous and upset, leave me to go to her. I will bring her down at once, she will come with me." And she went quickly into the house, followed by her sister.

They found May lying on her bed sobbing convulsively, while the hat and cloak in which she was to have travelled were lying on the floor where she had torn them off. Mrs. Vivian knelt down beside her and spoke caressingly.

"My dear child, you must control yourself and drive away all these dark fancies. You know how glad you were to hear that you were going to Mentone to see John Elrington again; you must not distress him and all of us as you did before, by giving way to these fits of nervousness. Come, get up and let us go, you must not keep poor Edward and your father waiting."

"Oh, why do you torture me?" cried May, lifting her blanched, tear-stricken face from the pillow. "I cannot leave this place. It would be easier to die than to go away to love and joy with that voice ever sounding in my ears—ever telling me of her, the widowed mother, mourning for her only son. Oh, leave me in pity that I may cease to hear it. Leave me! leave me!"

"What is to be done?" said Mrs. Vivian to her sister despairingly. "I cannot bear to see her tormented."

"There is only one course left to you," said Miss Berkeley in her quiet, sensible voice; "Edward must be your first consideration now, and for his sake you cannot delay your journey. Leave May here with me; I will stay with her till this hysterical paroxysm is past, and then I will bring her out to you at Mentone—I hope she may be able to travel in a few days."

And so it was arranged.

After her parents' departure, May gradually became composed. She remained in her room that day, but on the following morning she came down as usual, and in the course of about a week, she had returned to her usual sweet and gentle serenity without any trace remaining of her strange agitation.

There seemed no reason why she should not proceed on her journey to Mentone; and at last, choosing a favourable moment when May was sitting quietly beside her aunt, Miss Berkeley suggested that they should make their arrangements for rejoining her parents that day, and start on the following morning. At the very first sentence May sprang from her seat, trembling and pale, and caught her aunt almost frantically by the arm.

"Hush, hush!" she said; "for heaven's sake do not say a word

about my going away, or the horror will come back upon me and I dread it more than any language can express. I can feel it even now drawing near. If you say another word it will overtake me—the wailing voice will sound—oh, be silent on that subject, I entreat of you."

Miss Berkeley was a judicious woman. She took her niece by the hand and made her sit down again quietly by her side, while she spoke in a calm, firm voice.

"My dear May, I have no wish to distress you, but it is absolutely necessary for your own sake that we should come to a distinct understanding as to what you mean to do. I must let both your parents and Sir John Elrington know whether you intend to go to Mentone or not."

"Then write and tell them that I do not mean to go. That I cannot go—never—never."

"May, have you reflected on the result of such a determination?" said Miss Berkeley. "If you do not go to Mentone now, it is quite certain that all will be at an end between you and John Elrington. I believe that you love him," she added, looking keenly at the girl.

"With all my heart," said May impulsively.

"Then you had better understand clearly that you will lose him for ever if you do not go to meet him now, as you promised—he is not a man to be trifled with."

"Do you think I do not know that I have lost him already?" exclaimed May, flinging out her hands with a gesture of despair. "I knew it in that first moment when the unknown horror came between me and him. I hoped against hope for a little time after, but that second time when it fell upon me was final and fatal. I know now that I can never be his happy wife. It is all a dreadful mystery—I only know that awful vision, that mournful voice must for ever come between me and happiness; I may live on here, perhaps, in a precarious peace, but I must be dead to John Elrington—dead, as if I were already in my grave. Let us never speak of it again." Without another word she rose abruptly and left the room.

Miss Berkeley had been studying the doctrine of telepathy and various kindred theories, and she decided that some occult influence was at work on May Vivian which it was in vain to combat. She therefore wrote to Mrs. Vivian and told her all that had passed, adding that there was no longer the least hope of May joining them at Mentone.

John Elrington had already been waiting there some days in the hope of his young bride's arrival, and he had come to Mrs. Vivian's sitting-room in the hotel to watch for the post when this letter was brought in.

"From my sister," she said; "now we shall know when May is coming." She opened it quickly and Elrington anxiously scanned

her face while she read it; at last, however, she let it fall from her hands with a heavy sigh and turned hopelessly away. "Is your daughter coming?" said Sir John imperiously.

"No; you had better read my sister's account yourself."

He took up the letter and read it through, then his face hardened into an expression of proud and stern determination and he flung it down, saying coldly:

"Mrs. Vivian, there is no longer any question that I have received my quietus, and I have simply to inform you that I will trouble your daughter no more; to-morrow I shall leave this place for a long journey to India and elsewhere, and I trust that in those new scenes I may be able to forget the false hopes that were once so dear to me."

May Vivian's mother could make no answer to such a speech, and so they parted. John Elrington carried out his intention of leaving Mentone next day, and in this record he appears no more.

Miss Berkeley, unselfish woman as she was, remained living quietly with her niece at Ringwood Hall when she would much rather have been in her own London home; and May, though somewhat sad and silent, was docile and quiescent, now that the fatal subject was completely dropped between them.

## VI.

It was Christmas Eve, a dull, gloomy December day, and the two ladies were sitting quietly by the fireside—not apparently much disposed to brave the ungenial weather.

Suddenly, however, without addressing her aunt at all, May rose and left the room. Very hurriedly she dressed herself for walking, and went out. Some impulse, which she could not define or control, guided her feet at a rapid pace along the two or three miles which intervened between her home and the churchyard, where Harry Grantham lay in his untimely grave.

It was not a spot which the Vivians ever frequented, as it was at some distance from their own parish church; and when May arrived at the gate, and passed within the sad enclosure, she looked round vaguely, not knowing in which direction to turn for the tombstone she sought.

A man was engaged in repairing the churchyard wall, and she attracted his attention: he knew her well, for it was he who had held Harry Grantham's horse on that disastrous day and seen the dreadful occurrence which had made May Vivian his murderess. He came up to her, touching his hat.

"You'll be looking for young Mr. Grantham's grave I expect, Miss Vivian. I can show it to you; it's round the other side of the church."

"Thank you; take me to it," she answered. Then, as they walked on together, she looked at him curiously.

"How did you know that I wanted to find Mr. Grantham's grave?" she asked.

"Well, miss, it seemed natural like that you should come to grieve over him a bit—seeing that you was the cause of his death."

"I the cause of his death!" she exclaimed, standing still as if frozen with horror. "Do you mean to say that I killed him?"

"Yes, miss: you knew it, surely, as everyone else did; but no one better than me; for I was there holding his horse for him while he put his spurs right, when you came crashing over the hedge and struck him down like a log upon the earth. He was stone dead when we took him up—and there he lies," added the man, quite unaware what an awful revelation he had made to her in his brutal frankness. He pointed to a grave covered with a white marble slab, on which Harry Grantham's name appeared, with the words inscribed below it: "*The only son of his mother, and she was a widow.*"

With a wild cry of anguish May Vivian rushed forward and fell on her knees beside it.

"I am his murderess," she said. "Now I understand it all."

"Bless my soul; did she never know that afore!" exclaimed the labourer. He stood open-mouthed in his surprise, staring at her for a few minutes; then turned stolidly away and went back to his work.

May remained motionless, with her head laid upon the cold tombstone, suffering intensely, while strange, conflicting thoughts and feelings thronged upon her, as if from some mysterious source wholly apart from her own individuality; gradually, as she lay there prone upon the earth, a light began to dawn on her mind—a path seemed to open before her in the future wherein she was destined to walk, and find the peace and sense of rectitude which had been literally torn from her by her dark psychological experience. An hour passed over her—an hour which separated her for ever from all that had been life to her before, and set her on the threshold of a new retributive existence.

When she rose, pale indeed, but calm and resolute, while her eyes shone with a pure light altogether free from the troubled, bewildered expression with which they had so long been clouded, she turned, and with a quick, firm step, took her way to the Granthams' house. Arrived at the door where Harry had stood on that fatal hunting morning, glowing with the strong young life which seemed then to be stretching out so many years before him, she rang the bell, and, when the servant appeared, asked to see Lady Grantham.

The man answered that her ladyship received no visitors.

"She will see me," said May decisively; and, walking past the astonished butler, she went on through the hall as if impelled by some strange instinct, and opened a door, which was, in fact, that of Lady Grantham's sitting-room. She closed it softly as she entered, and stood for a moment with her eyes fixed sadly on the spectacle before her.

The room was darkened by the closed blinds, which had never been lifted since the young man's coffin was carried from the house. Opposite to a picture of him which hung on the wall sat the widowed mother, her mournful gaze rivetted upon it as she lay back wearily in her chair, with her unoccupied hands clasped on her lap. She turned her head at the sound of the closing door, and May, meeting her questioning glance, darted forward and sunk on her knees by her side.

"Forgive me! oh, forgive me!" the girl cried out. "I never knew till within this last hour that I was the unhappy cause of your terrible agony in your cruel loss. But the weight of your misery has been upon me, wrenching me away from all happiness, though I could not understand it, and now I feel as if I could die to gain your forgiveness."

Sobs choked her utterance, and Lady Grantham, disengaging her hand from May's convulsive grasp, laid it gently on her bowed head.

"Poor child," she said, "I owe you no forgiveness; I well know that you were but the unconscious instrument of the Power which has decreed my desolation. I have never blamed you; rather, May, I have thought of you tenderly, for my Harry loved you—you knew that it was so, did you not?"

"No," said May, looking up with her tear-dimmed eyes. "I did not then—not—not when I used to see him; but I have known it in some mysterious way since he has been gone, and therefore I have dared to come to you."

"Yes, he loved you truly, and for his sake you must be ever dear to me, even though you——" She stopped, shuddering, and then went on sadly: "Ah! May, he would have made you happier than the cold, proud man you have chosen; it is bitter, indeed, to think of John Elrington in all the sunshine of happiness by your side and my Harry lying alone in his dark grave." Her mournful voice sank to a whisper, and May flung her arms round her.

"Lady Grantham, I shall never be John Elrington's wife; we are parted utterly and for ever—all is at end between us. Harry has willed it so and I consent. I want only to be your child, your daughter, to do all for you I might have done had I been your dear son's wife. Oh! let me come to you, let me be with you always; you have called me—yes, you have called me again and again, and he has risen before me and pointed to you in your loneliness. I have understood his desire, and I have come; it is only just and right that I should give my life to you since it was my terrible fate to take his dear and priceless life away from you."

"Dear child, you are generous to think of such a sacrifice, and I should be thankful indeed to have you with me, for my Harry loved you, and my cruel desolation makes me often feel as if I could endure it no longer and must seek oblivion in that grave where my darling lies and I, in heart, am buried with him—but how could I take you from your parents? they would never consent to give you to me."

"They would—they must," said May vehemently; "they would have given me up for ever to John Elrington: how much more righteously to you! I am theirs no longer. I know, I feel, that I belong to you. I took your darling from you, and it is he who gives me to you now. Oh, make no more resistance. There are powers at work we cannot combat. Let us never part again."

"May, I believe that you are right," said Lady Grantham slowly. "I, too, have often felt lately a strange influence that made me long for you as if my Harry desired that you should fill the void your own unconscious action has made in my life; now all is clear and right; it shall be as you say—in this world we will part no more. I have lost a son—you shall be to me as a daughter."

She bent down and kissed May with a certain solemnity as if to seal a vital compact, while the girl's grasp tightened round her. And thus it is that the curtain falls on this strange drama—with the widowed mother clasped in the arms of her who had caused the death of her only son, and finding in that embrace a heavenly peace and consolation.

## FOREGONE.

THERE is none anywhere
So beautiful as she, or half so dear;
My soul is glad whenever she draws near,
Because she is so good and sweet and fair.

I shall not be the one
To break the cloistered stillness of her youth;
To teach her passion and pain and love and truth,
And lead her through the Garden of the Sun.

But when her joy-bells ring
I think, perhaps, that I shall smile and sigh,
And wish that roses did not bloom to die,
And that the birds of June might always sing.

For I am sad and wise,
And where my dreams lie dead the grass has grown;
But she has taught me grief for youth long flown,
And what men mean who talk of Paradise.

E. NESBIT.

# THE BRETONS AT HOME.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Letters from Majorca," "Through Holland," etc.

Breton Peasant.

WE had intended returning by train to Quimper, even as we had come. But this did not enter into the views of our enterprising driver. In his opinion, we should do much better to keep the carriage for the next two days, take a long drive round the coast, sleep at Beg-Meil, continue our journey the next day to Concarneau, and arrive at Quimper in the evening of that day.

The idea commended itself to us; the plan seemed good; with all his faults, he was an excellent driver, and the trap was comfortable; it was a very agreeable way of travelling. But Beg-Meil? We had never heard of it. Where and what was it?

"Beg-Meil?" said Jean le cocher. "It was a new discovery. In time it would be the most famous sea-side place in Brittany. Already it had the best hotel to be found anywhere, at which people stayed the whole summer through. To miss Beg-Meil would be disastrous."

This sounded well, but we felt that it must be taken cum grano; there is often a great deal of difference between promise and performance. Therefore we took Madame at the hotel into our council, and gave her the casting vote.

"You could not do better," was her reply. "If you are willing to give the two days to the drive, it will well repay you. In fine weather the country is charming. You will see Pont-l'Abbé and the rocks of Penmarc'h, which are grand, though not at all equal to the Pointe du Raz. Beg-Meil I have never visited, but from all accounts it must be a little paradise, though isolated; and just at this time

of the year you will have it all to yourselves. As for Concarneau, it is one of the most interesting fishing places in our part of the world."

This short debate had taken place in Madame's bureau, after her excellent table d'hôte had come to an end. Our little driver had arrived for our decision, and stood like a stork upon one leg, all anxiety and eagerness. There seemed no choice in the matter; it would never do to miss this succession of interesting points. Therefore it was settled that we should start early the next morning, and Jean departed in the seventh heaven of delight.

We went down to the little harbour of Douarnenez, and watched the shades of night falling upon the water and the boats. The lighthouse had mounted its beacon, and one by one the lights shone out from the little fleet in the offing. All was very quiet and still; not a soul upon the pier, no stirring amongst the vessels; a charming picture of still life and repose; of rest after toil; a vivid contrast to the little town, where, as we passed through the narrow thoroughfares, the fisher men and women were loitering in rough and rather noisy groups.

The fishing element of the town keeps itself very much apart from the ordinary population. A small colony of houses also stretches on the side of the steep cliff down to the port, and zig-zag paths led from one house to another, but were not tempting enough to explore. The bathing beach is quite a mile and a half away from the town.

We returned through the darkness, losing our way in all sorts of impossible windings, and sometimes coming back to our starting point. In our own part of the town all was quiet. The last train was in, the last omnibus had rattled up with its solitary passenger—an enterprising Frenchman, who contemplated doing to-morrow what we had done to-day. Madame was casting up her accounts in her bureau; and Monsieur, his duties in the kitchen at an end, was smoking the pipe of peace with a friendly neighbour on a bench in front of the hotel.

"A strange little town, monsieur," he said, as we took seat beside him, before going in for the night. "You may well think yourselves at the ends of the earth. All might be so much better than it is, if we had any enterprise amongst us. I have done my best to stir up the authorities, but it is of no use. We go on in the same sleepy way year after year. I thought that when the railway was opened we should awaken, but instead of that we seem slower than ever. The fishing prospers, but the town remains stationary. The fishermen have the money, and will catch and cure their fish and send it out into the world though the rest of the town fell into wreck and ruin."

"Yet few towns equal you in situation," we observed.

"That is the pity of it," replied our host. "We are so little, and we might be so much. The whole town, the whole fishing colony, wants taking down and rebuilding, and that will never happen

Even Audierne has greater possibilities than Douarnenez, or it would have, if the railway were extended to it."

"Audierne is nearer that wonderful rocky coast," we observed, "and you may enjoy its fine pier and harbour without toiling through a labyrinth of back streets. Here you are cut off from the harbour and the sea. You must even walk a mile and a half to bathe."

"Ah! that Pointe du Raz!" exclaimed our host enthusiastically. "Many a pilgrimage have I made there. It attracts me as the sunshine draws the cloud. I have seen it over and over again in all moods. Days when it has been calm as a lake, and you might think it absolutely motionless but for the froth and foam surrounding the rocks. Days when the sea has been running mountains high, and every succeeding wave seemed to dash with greater fury against the iron coast. I remember one storm in particular. The time was five years ago last November. It was an intensely dark night. All day long the sea and the wind had been rising. By ten o'clock it blew a perfect hurricane; by midnight I had never seen or heard anything so terrible. Flash after flash of lightning showed up the sky and intensified the succeeding darkness. The thunder rolled and crashed overhead, until many of us thought the last day had arrived. The bell of the village church could scarcely be heard ten yards away. All the village folk were abroad on the heights, for no one could rest in bed on such a night. Every flash revealed the groups with startling vividness, and on every face might be read awe and anxiety. Every one seemed waiting for a given signal. It came—the signal of a ship in distress. Suddenly a rocket shot up into the air. A vessel was being driven on to the rocks. In the flashes we dimly saw a huge form struggling hopelessly with the waves. We lighted bonfires, and the lighthouse flashed its warning, but of what use was all this at such a moment?"

"And the vessel—was she saved?" we asked, for Monsieur had paused in his narrative to re-light his pipe.

"She was dashed to pieces," he replied, "and her living freight went with her. By that time we had all left the heights and gone down to the beach, though powerless to help. No boat could live in such a sea; the bravest amongst the villagers felt it would be throwing away their own lives to attempt it. So there we waited in helpless agony, whilst the good ship went to pieces and passengers and crew were rocked to their last sleep. The first body to be washed ashore was that of a woman, clasping an infant to her breast. She was quite dead, but strange to say, the child was still living. It was taken by one of the good mothers of the village, and there it remains to this day—the only little life that was spared amongst them all; and she—scarcely a year old—was too young to tell the heart-rending tale. But these scenes are constantly taking place on our rocky coast; the people grow familiar with them, or I hardly know how they would live through them."

We were sitting partly in shadow, partly in the light thrown by the hotel on to the road. The street was deserted; most people had gone in for the night; all was calm and quiet. The landlord's long pipe glowed in the darkness. He fell into silence and seemed to be brooding upon the scene he had just described.

"Yes," he said presently; "if I were not master of this hotel, I would sooner be lighthouse keeper at the Pointe du Raz than anything else. I should like to live for ever in sight and sound of that wonderful sea and coast. Sometimes, I feel inclined to enter into a speculation and build an inn there. But it would fail; it is too remote, too far from a railway; I must be content."

"Do you know Beg-Meil?" we asked him.

"Indeed I do," he returned. "It is a charming spot and has a future before it. If to-morrow be fine you will have a magnificent day. I could find it in my heart to turn coachman and drive you myself; but things go wrong here without the head to guide them."

We had to be up early the next morning, so bidding our host good-night, we left him to his bench, his pipe, his neighbour and his recollections: one more instance of the strange freaks of destiny. Here was a man whose soul seemed in tune with nature in her wild moods, passing his life in the prosy details of a commonplace household, and devoting his energies to the serious task of making both ends meet at the end of the year.

The next morning rose with promise. Our coachman was more than punctual. He had got himself up in his very best, and his face beamed again. Monsieur and Madame assisted at our departure; a very worthy couple, whose house was far more comfortable and better kept than anything we had found in Quimper.

The town was soon left behind and we passed into the country. Now the road skirted the coast, and showed up a wide extent of sea sparkling in the sunshine. Now, turning inland, we passed through lanes where the hedges were high and everything was flourishing and cultivated. Here and there small, well-kept farmhouses looked the essence of peace and prosperity. Fields of grain waved in the breeze, and innumerable orchards groaned under the weight of their fruit; apples that would presently be turned into cider being most abundant. The country was richer and more cultivated than is often the case in Brittany, where, under the influence of gray skies and damp climate, fruit and crops come to slow and not very luxuriant perfection. The few people we met on the way wished us the "Bon jour," the men taking off their hats, the women nodding their heads as if we had been old acquaintances. The driver was evidently well-known to many, and the familiar greetings that passed were all given in the unknown tongue. We came upon few villages, and those few were small and deserted. About eleven o'clock the roofs and church towers of Pont-l'Abbé opened up; we crossed the bridge over the river which gives its

name to the town, and immediately after drew up at the primitive little inn.

If Douarnenez was quiet and uneventful, Pont l'Abbé was still more so. It has not above half the number of inhabitants, but is more interesting and better built. Many of the streets are quaint; many of the houses are old; grass grows in the deserted thoroughfares. In many a doorway girls and women were sitting, embroidering the costumes of the country, and many a window exhibited the work for sale. Nearly all the women we saw wore the costume. It was varied and fanciful, and the costumes are amongst the most ancient in Brittany. The curious and original caps scarcely cover the crown of the head, and yellow and scarlet seemed the distinguishing colours. To a great extent the men have abandoned their costume, but those that remain are very quaint, consisting of vestments of various colours and sizes, bound round with broad tape bearing inscriptions written in different coloured wools.

Breton Peasant.

Pont l'Abbé is an ancient baronial stronghold, and some remains of the castle in which the barons held sway still exist on the banks of the river, a picturesque and still inhabited building. Close to this a sale of fish, and an animated scene was going on. A small crowd of men and women were pushing each other about, haggling and bargaining, and making noise enough for a Dutch auction. The spirit of commerce evidently was not quite dead in the sleepy town, which dates back to the twelfth century. Its first baron, Juhel du Pont, was taken prisoner at the siege of Dol in 1173.

The parish church is part of an ancient Carmelite convent, founded in 1383 and restored in the fifteenth century. It is chiefly remarkable for its beautiful rose window, and once upon a time possessed very interesting and graceful cloisters. These have long since ceased to be trodden by the monks. In the church some of the ancient barons of Pont l'Abbé repose in tombs emblazoned with their shields and quarterings.

Here, whilst our horses rested, we took a fresh conveyance for Penmarc'h. Passing out of the town by the river-side, we presently left on our right a fine sixteenth century château of Gothic architecture, that has been well restored by its present owner and possesses an interesting collection of antiquities, besides a fresco of the time of Henri IV. This Château de Kernuz, as it is called, withstood a bold attack at the time of the Ligue, and in the park belonging to it the Lord of Kernuz who valiantly resisted the enemy lies buried.

The surrounding country was flat and bare; few objects remain to show that it has played any part in the past. It is the country of dolmens and menhirs, and the singular mounds attributed to the Druids are the only inequalities to be found here. Between Plomeur, an unimportant village through which we passed, and Penmarc'h the country abounds with these ancient relics. The place might be a graveyard containing the bodies of those who have slept for ages in undisturbed repose; it looked a huge, bare plain—uncultivated, abandoned. The villagers of Plomeur seemed rude and uncivilised; the children running about the street looked ragged and uncared for. Probably they are simply poor, though here even the poorest happily seldom fall short of the necessaries of life.

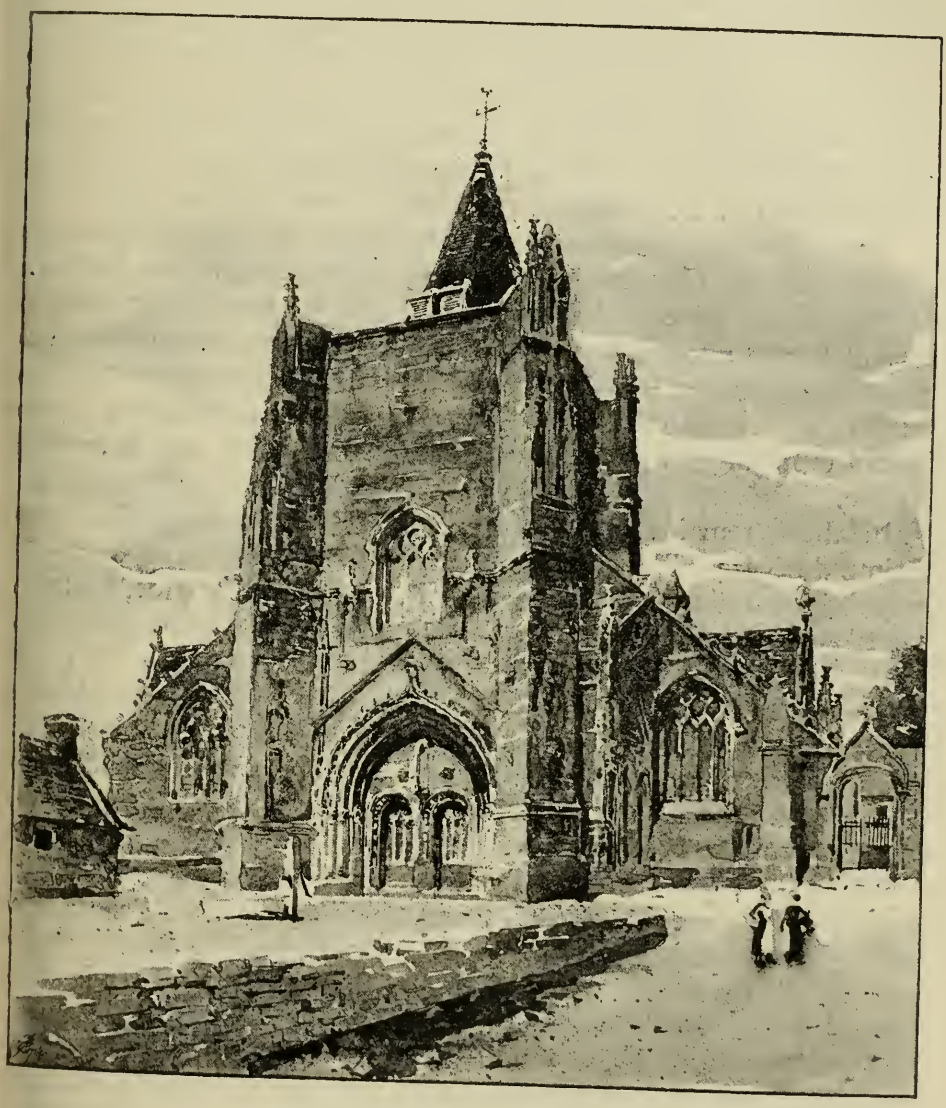
Finally, after a drive of about three quarters of an hour, we reached Penmarc'h. The village is at a little distance from the shore and the lighthouse.

Four hundred years ago it was a place of importance; one of the chief maritime cities of France, taking rank with Nantes. It was rich and its trade was extensive. The whole territory between Penmarc'h and Kerity was one great, densely-populated town, of which to-day you may trace many of the ruins. Nothing remains of the former prosperity but an historical record and a few isolated buildings. There are, for instance, six churches in the neighbourhood, marking the extent of the ancient town. To resist the invasion of enemies, both at home and abroad, many of the houses possessed their own private fortifications. Several, of the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries, yet remain, with their battlemented walls and portcullis crowned by a small turret containing an alarm bell.

But there came an end to the great city. Suddenly the soil subsided, and a tidal wave swept away part of the town; and lastly Fontenelle, towards the end of the Ligue, came down with his brigands and pillaged and destroyed the remainder. The town never recovered the blow. It gradually disappeared, leaving nothing but a wide extent of ruins to show what once had been. Of these ruins few traces remain, and even they will soon disappear, for the stones are being removed to build up houses elsewhere.

The villagers of Penmarc'h—a village that has sprung up upon the ruins of the ancient city—were as inquisitive and uncivilised as those of Plomeur. Their lives are marked by few events, and a traveller passing through to the seashore will call them to their doors and

create a little excitement. The village contained nothing of interest excepting the church: the largest of all the churches that existed in the neighbourhood, dedicated to St. Nonna, and dating entirely from the beginning of the sixteenth century. Rising above the small houses, it looked dignified. Exposed to three centuries of storm and



PENMARC'H.

empest, showing a bold front to the sea, it has gradually assumed a ine tone and colouring. Above the front rises a substantial square ower, supported by heavy buttresses, and in the arcade of the Gothic loorway, dating from 1508, are rich sculpturings of ships, whilst the nouldings are finished off with delicately-carved vine leaves. The nterior has some good stained windows.

A short drive from the church brought us to the lighthouse and

the very edge of the sea—or rather to where the sea would be at high water. The whole beach before us was one great extent of flat, slippery rocks, wet and weedy, with pools and crevices of water between them. Here were no bold cliffs; nothing, apparently, to resist the inroads of the sea in its furious moods and save the surrounding country from being swamped. Wild, desolate and savage it all looked, but without the grandeur and magnificence of the Pointe du Raz. To atone for this, the coast is less dangerous, and fewer wrecks take place. Right and left, at a distance, may be seen a group of still inhabited houses. That to the left is Kerity, and close to its lighthouse is a small church, now almost in ruins, formerly a Commandery of the Knight Templars.

So far, the neighbourhood of Penmarc'h is historically interesting. Some of the six churches that formerly existed are in ruins, of which the most imposing and important is the Chapel of St. Guénolé, dating back to the fifteenth century. The fine square tower still remains, supported by buttresses, and above its rich portal is a large window with remarkably fine tracery. The west front is also adorned with sculpturings of sea subjects, and an inscription that is no longer legible.

In these remains, Penmarc'h possesses the advantage over the Pointe du Raz. The coast sweeps round in a vast curve, and far off may be seen the point of Audierne. The sea is wide, and when the tide turns rolls in rapidly: the flat rocks disappear, and the water washes almost the very feet of the lighthouse.

The air was fresh and bracing, and we felt that we should like to spend a long week exploring the coast and the ruins, and sailing upon the lovely water. It was a wonderful scene, wild and remote, and somehow felt a little less uncivilised than the Pointe du Raz; perhaps because a few more people were in evidence.

When we took our way back to Pont l'Abbé, we felt that it was a farewell to this wild and romantic coast of Finistère. We had seen it in its calmer mood, "with a west wind blowing," but we realised all it was capable of when the spirit of the storm is abroad with all its powers of destruction.

We returned to Pont l'Abbé in time for déjeuner, a series of mysterious dishes strongly flavoured with garlic, everyone of which had to be refused. Two Bretons at the table who appreciated everything, wondered openly at our want of taste. But this was not the only dilemma in which we found ourselves. We had left Quimper without a sufficiency of French money, and at Pont l'Abbé it became necessary to change English money into the coin of the realm. At Douarnenez they had declined both notes and gold, declaring that they could do nothing with them, but that Pont l'Abbé, having more communication with foreign powers, would take any amount.

Pont l'Abbé, however, quite as much as Douarnenez, declined the honour. We were sent from one house to another, always

with the same result—they had no use for English money. Neither notes, nor gold, nor premium would tempt them. It was a predicament, for we had only enough French money to carry us to Concarneau; and it seemed unlikely that Concarneau, a small fishing place, would be more civilised and obliging.

We met with a Welsh missionary at Pont l'Abbé, who lived and worked amongst the people, and was well known; and even with his help failed in our object. The missionary was all kindness, and showed us what little the town possessed of interest. He worked chiefly amongst the sailors, and found it slow and difficult work to penetrate to their intelligences, or make much impression upon them; but on the whole he liked the Bretons, and perseverance generally met with its reward in the end.

We left Pont l'Abbé when the sun had reached its meridian, on our way to Beg-Meil. The coachman had in no way exaggerated the charms of the drive. As before, the country was fertile and cultivated. In many of the narrow country lanes the hedges were high, and wild flowers grew in abundance. Here and there small pine forests plunged us into a delightful and shady coolness; the sun threw lights and shadows across our path, and squirrels darted from tree to tree, impudently looking down upon us from safe distances, their tails arched and their small, black eyes shining out like beads in a setting of brown fur.

Presently we reached an arm of the sea, where we should have to be ferried to the opposite shore, the small watering-place of Bénodet. It possesses a great deal of quiet beauty much appreciated by the people of Quimper, who come here in the summer to bathe and boat, and revive themselves after the close confinement of the town.

The ferry-boat was on the other side of the broad sheet of water. It took the men some time to collect themselves, and then they very slowly and deliberately came over, the whole thing being rather a clumsy and primitive arrangement. Horses and carriage were got on board with some difficulty, and we commenced our perilous voyage, feeling like Robinson Crusoe embarking upon his raft.

It is a very lovely spot. Out to the right the sea opened up, and the sun flashed and shimmered upon the water. White-winged pleasure boats flitted about the bay; further away fishing boats were putting out to sea. Before us rose picturesque Bénodet, rapidly becoming a compromise between a village and a fashionable watering-place. The arm of water stretched far up to the left, and the shore, sloping steeply, was splendidly wooded with pine trees.

The men made slow progress with their oars and their long poles, but at length the further shore was reached, and everything was landed with the same cautious movement. The horses, glad to return to their own element, set off briskly, and about five o'clock we passed through Fouesnant, a small town celebrated throughout Finistère for the beauty of its women. They are, however, equally

celebrated for their flirting propensities. H. C. roused up as we passed through the streets, and arranged himself for conquest, but all to no purpose; streets and windows were deserted. We soon turned into a rough, narrow lane bordered by high hedges, leading to the sea. So rough and steep the road, that once or twice we narrowly escaped being overturned; but nothing daunted our little driver, who grew quite excited as we neared our destination.

"We approach," he cried. "Ah! Beg-Meil! it is the loveliest spot in Brittany."

It had need be something after this perilous descent.

At last, through the trees, the lovely sheet of water opened up, calm and beautiful under the evening sky. In a few moments we were almost on a level with the sea, and, entering an enclosure, half farm-yard, half court-yard, drew up at the door of the inn.

A new building, chiefly of wood, light and airy and clean-looking, and we were taken with it at once. The house reminded us of some of the Norwegian "stations," and seemed almost as solitary and out of the world. We had evidently done well to come. The landlady gave us a delightfully homely greeting, took us under her wing without ceremony, and led the way to her best rooms. We had the whole place to ourselves, and absolute freedom; everything was perfect in its simplicity.

"This is paradise," said H. C. "I have not felt so happy since I came to Brittany. Let us stay here a month."

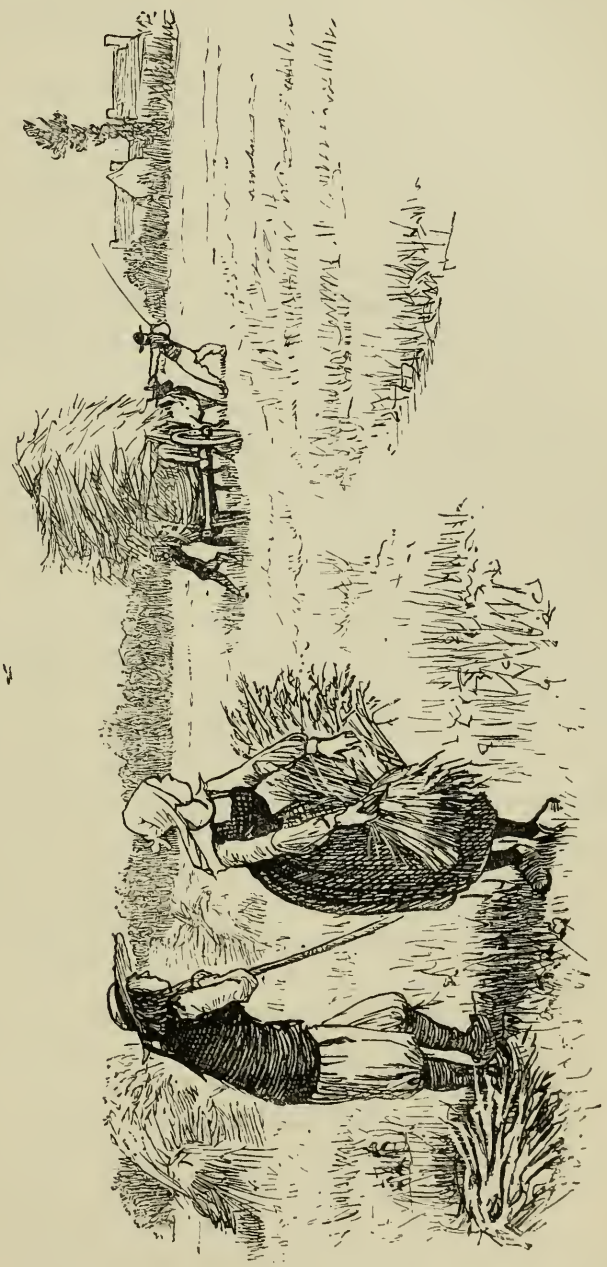
It really seemed an earthly paradise. The inn was surrounded by a wild and picturesque garden, and a few feet of rapid descent brought us to the beach, where the waves broke and plashed upon the sandy shore. It is only a broad arm of the sea—the Baie de la Forest, as it is called—and on the further side rose the shores of Concarneau.

Hitherto, Beg-Meil has been nothing but a semaphore station: a small telegraph office at the Point taking note of the movement upon the water. On this side the shore has been wild and desolate, uninhabited. But now that an hotel has been built, it will presently become popular and well known; will grow into a watering-place, and lose its charm.

To-day, we were thoroughly sensible of the charm of this complete retirement from the world. Before us stretched the bay, the broad sea itself opening out to the right. On the opposite shore, Concarneau and all the well-known, well-frequented coast; a fair wind and a small sailing boat would have taken us over within the hour, and spared us the long round by land we should have on the morrow.

Below the hotel, a long strip of down stretched away to the right, at the very end of which stood the telegraph station; a huge dolmen near it might have been a giant's grave, but was only another Druidical remain. Brittany was evidently a favourite land of theirs, and unless the climate has much changed, they must have been a sad people, loving rainy days and grey skies.

Merely to wander about these downs and feel them all our own was exquisite enjoyment. The colouring of land and water was strangely beautiful. At the point flat shelving rocks stretched out, and the sea plashed and frothed gently around them. It was a perfectly still evening, scarcely a cloud in the sky. The lowering sun poured a flood of light upon the water, which was caught up and returned in a myriad flashes. Quite an army of small fishing-boats lay between us and the horizon—the fishing fleet of Concarneau.



HARVEST-TIME IN BRITTANY.

We thought we would send a message into the world: perhaps the first private message that had ever gone out from Beg-Meil. The men were so inexperienced they even did not know what to charge.

"You must give us what you think right," said they; "we are never asked to dispatch messages. Few people come here, and no one ever telegraphs."

"Do you not find it slow work and dull, always living here without change?" we asked.

"No," one of them replied; "we have work enough in our occupation; and in our leisure we fish, or dig our garden, or go up to Fouesnant. The time passes quickly, except in winter, when the nights are long and dark and the days are short. Even then we make the best of it. We can always get removed after a certain time."

We felt that if our lines had been cast here, we should never want to be removed. It was civilization in a lovely desert; for when we went back to the inn, prepared for a modest repast, we found that we fared sumptuously. In this out-of-the-world spot it seemed incredible. Dinner was served in the verandah, within sight and sound of the sea, whilst the trees immediately about us kept up a gentle murmur. The maid who waited of course wore a very becoming Brittany cap, that indispensable touch to the picturesque in these latitudes. The bottled cider was better than the best of champagne, and H. C. endeavoured to enter into a contract whereby large supplies should be exported for his own immediate use in his Yorkshire shooting-box. But there were too many difficulties in the way and the idea fell through. So he made the very most of the present opportunity, and presently asked the landlady whether it would be possible to get up a minuet in the establishment, and would she favour him with her hand. In the season, she replied, it would be quite easy, and many a lady would be glad to honour him; but to-night if he wanted to dance, he would be reduced to executing a pas seul. This did not suit him, and again the idea fell through.

We went out whilst the afterglow still lingered in the sky. It all seemed more lovely than ever, more calm and peaceful, more full of a tone and colouring not to be described. Darkness fell upon sea and land; the stars came out, large and flashing; a crescent moon went down in the west; the steady light gleaming from the telegraph station was the only evidence of life about us.

The windows of our rooms looked on to the sloping garden and the lovely sea, all very bright and visible the next morning, when we rose early and wandered down to the point. The sun had risen before us, and the air was fresh and sparkling. So also was the water that flashed and swirled about the rocks. Boats that had been toiling all night were making for Concarneau. The downs, green and undulating, looked desolate. We and the telegraph men had them all to ourselves.

When we returned to the inn Madame had prepared coffee in great bowls, and hot galettes that she had purposely made for us—a feast for a monarch.

"You ought to stay here at least a week," she said, "if you wish to know how the place grows upon you. Last year I had two ladies from Russia during the whole summer, and every day they declared they liked it better. Just now we have too little to do, when it becomes more known we shall have too much. But I like to be busy and to go to bed feeling that I have earned my rest. One sleeps the better for it."

A long day was before us, and soon after breakfast we started for Concarneau. The little driver beamed as usual, and rejoiced that he had not overpraised Beg-Meil. We felt that we owed him a debt of gratitude, for certainly but for him we should never have known

anything about it. The unexpected had, perhaps, had something to do with our delight in these undiscovered charms.

We mounted the rough lane and passed through Fouesnant. Again, to H. C.'s disappointment, the beauties hid themselves as effectually as if they had belonged to a harem, and we passed away to enjoy the less capricious beauties of nature.

One or two picturesque villages broke the monotony of the journey; and on the road we passed a good many country people. It was evidently market-day somewhere. Many were dressed in costume, and the way we had to return salutations, and good wishes offered in the unknown tongue, made our drive difficult as a royal progress.

It came to an end. From an elevated position we saw before us the grey roofs of Concarneau, the fortifications, the port and its shipping, and the lovely, shimmering sea beyond all. A short, quick descent, and we came to an anchor before the rather homely-looking hotel on the port, in front of the grey walls of the old town.

For Concarneau is a town within a town: the New town and the Old or Close town, as it is called. The latter is strongly fortified with bastions, gateways and drawbridges, surrounded by the sea at high water. The grey walls are massive and formidable, some portions dating back to the fourteenth century, but all useless and unnecessary in the present day. The town within the walls consists of one long, crooked street, a few narrow courts, or *ruelles*, branching right and left. None of the beauties of antiquity will be found here. Enclosed in the high walls the atmosphere is hot and unwholesome, whilst the people themselves have little to recommend them. From the new town the aspect of the old town is very striking. The walls, gateways, drawbridges, the inflowing sea—all contribute to form a very unusual scene; but once within the walls the charm disappears. We had heard much of the quaintness of the old town, and were disappointed.

On the other hand, the new town more than realised our expectations. It was bright and full of life and sparkle and movement. Every year adds to its prosperity, and the people look animated and enterprising. The port forms quite a harbour of refuge, into which large vessels and even men-of-war may enter. The position of the town is very striking. There is width and breadth about it, whilst the houses are light and cheerful-looking. The place has the appearance rather of an overgrown village, with its unpretending buildings and its sense of freedom and unconventionality.

Beyond the port lies the harbour, and gazing down upon it from the heights at the head of the pier, we felt all the charm of a very dazzling scene. The tide came rolling gently in between the piers, and the sun poured his hot rays upon all. Innumerable boats, white-winged or brown-sailed, were coming in and going out—the fishing fleet of Concarneau, which numbers upwards of five hundred small vessels, and gives work to thirteen thousand men. Beyond all

stretched the lovely Baie de la Forest, so called from the forest of trees that lined the shores, and still line them in many places, down to the very water's edge, where they stoop and kiss their reflections. Across the bay was Beg-Meil, and with our glasses we plainly discerned the telegraph station, the downs and the inn, and fancied we saw our landlady in the verandah gazing across at Concarneau, possibly wondering whether we had arrived there.

The jetty, at the head of which we stood, was a scene of the liveliest character. The lighthouse close at hand was surrounded by the most picturesque women and girls dressed in charming costumes, and sitting in rows, most of them knitting. But the moment we tried to photograph them they all rushed up and tore away, as if the camera had been a deadly weapon. There was great screaming and laughter, and some of the older women chided them for what they called their folly. It had no effect upon them; they would not be taken—perhaps for some superstitious reason about which we felt it would be useless to enquire.

A long flight of steps led down to a large stone landing-stage, for which some of the boats coming into the harbour were making. It was crowded with fishwives pressing round them with empty baskets. A Babel was going on, and every woman's life might have depended upon her getting a full supply. To-day the harvest was abundant. Seeing us coming down with our small camera, they placed themselves in attitudes, each more eager than the other to be taken, each fighting for the front place. There was neither shyness nor superstition about them, as there had been about the younger women. The whole scene formed a singular and striking picture, and was very amusing.

The men in the boats were brown and weatherbeaten, husbands and sons of the crowding fishwives. As each woman's basket was filled she marched up the steps in triumph, her sabots echoing. It was all very opposite to yesterday's experience. Beg-Meil had been a perfect example of still life, almost of desolation; nothing could be more crowded and animated than the haven of Concarneau. Each scene was good in its place.

Our inn itself was homely, but comfortable. The dining-room was made interesting and picturesque by a series of small sketches painted by different artists who had stayed there. Many of them were more than excellent, and some were by men who had become famous in the world. The landlady, obliging and decidedly in advance of her neighbourhood, was ready to change us any amount of English money into French, thereby releasing us from what would have been a serious embarrassment. There was a sad air about her, as if she found the struggle of life a little too much for her. She was still young and had two small children, who were evidently to her "la pluie et le beau temps."

"Life is hard," she said, as she placed some French money in our hands in exchange for English. "I have found it so ever since I

A Storm in Finistère

lost my husband last year. This place is difficult for a woman to manage. I have never a moment to myself by day, and half my nights are passed in anxious thought for the future."

"Yet you seem to be doing well," we remarked.

"I am fairly prosperous," she replied; "but I am one of those who are over anxious; it is a bad thing, I know, and not right, but it is my temperament—que voulez-vous? Tell me," she said, as she handled some of the crisp English paper, "are there any false notes in England?"

"Yes," we returned, "but they are not very common, and we can assure you that these are genuine."

"I don't doubt it," she laughed; "but there are others who come to me sometimes whose faces are not exactly passports to one's favour. I never quite know what to do on those occasions. You are more than honest, for you have given me a note too many."

It was true. We had left H. C. to count them out, and instead of applying himself to the task, he had been studying Madame's pensive eyes and modulated tones, and feasting his gaze upon a wonderful Brittany cap, all lace and mysterious details, that the waiting maid was wearing. It gave her quite a refined and charming appearance.

"It is the custom of the country," said our landlady in answer to his remark. "Concarneau is noted for its pretty caps."

"And its pretty women, no doubt," returned H. C. "I should like to buy a cap as a curiosity. It would tell wonderfully in a picture."

"Nothing more easy," returned Madame. "Maria," to the maid, "would you sell your cap to this gentleman?"

"Mais oui," replied Maria. "I made it; I can make another. But I have a better upstairs, more worth taking to England. It is my Sunday cap."

And in a few moments she came down with it in her hand. H. C. examined it critically.

"I prefer the one you have on," he said at last. "Perhaps the face beneath it makes it look so much more picturesque than this one."

"Pray don't turn her head with idle compliments," reproved Madame, laughing. "They are quite silly and vain enough as it is."

"He is a charming gentleman, Madame," said Maria, blushing very prettily. "Do not chide him for his little flatteries. I am quite used to being told that I am pretty; I assure you it has no effect upon me—du reste I quite see it for myself. As for the cap, monsieur," turning to H. C., "if you prefer the one I have on, you shall have it. By chance I put it on fresh this morning. It is all made and washed and goffred with my own hands."

And without further ceremony she went up to a mirror, took off the cap she was wearing, and put on the other. It seemed a fright-

fully complicated affair, and H. C. was so long learning the mysteries of the folds under Maria's instructions, that for once I thought him obtuse. At length Madame took the lesson into her own hands, and all stupidity immediately vanished. Maria was handsomely rewarded, and H. C. became possessor of the treasure.

"You ought to like Concarneau," said Madame, as she neatly folded the cap into a small box. "It was once occupied by the English; and although it is as far back as 1373, I feel as if their traces still remained. It is true, I hardly know where or how. Du Guesclin laid siege to it—rather a terrible siege, I believe, and in the end it surrendered. The English are not often vanquished," she politely added, "but starvation is a foe the strongest must yield to."

"Was it never retaken by the English?" asked H. C.

"Never. It was hardly worth the trouble. In 1488 de Rohan half destroyed it by command of Charles VIII. Then de Rieux retook it from the French in 1489, and rebuilt all the fortifications. At that time it was nothing but a stronghold for the robbers and murderers in the country; but in 1557, it rose into note, and was the fourth fortified town in Brittany."

"We are disappointed in the part of the old town," said H. C.

"So is everyone," returned Madame quickly. "From these windows it is imposing, and I have heard artists rave about the tone of the walls and the splendour of the masonry; but once over the drawbridge, all charm disappears. It is close, ugly and unhealthy. I must say that the granite ramparts are magnificent, and I love to see the sea rolling in and filling that immense moat. The largest bastion is attributed to the Queen Anne, and so is the immense well, which I daresay escaped your notice. The north gate is called la Porte aux Vins, because all the wine that comes to Concarneau by sea is unloaded there."

"It is altogether very interesting," said H. C.; "perhaps the most picturesque seaport in Brittany. You need have no anxiety about the future. Artists will always come here, and they alone would fill your house a great part of the year."

"I don't know," sighed Madame. "So many of them rush off to Pont-Aven. It really is not half so picturesque as Concarneau, though it may be more rural. And then I find that nine artists out of ten want everything for nothing. Either they are very poor, or they are great spendthrifts elsewhere, for when they get to Concarneau they have very little left in their purses. But I am glad you think our town interesting."

We had also found at least one interesting person in the town, whom we had discovered through a misunderstanding. It happened as follows:

We had been told that a certain Monsieur X. possessed the most wonderful collection of old curiosities in Brittany, any of which he was willing to part with: in short, that he made it his trade.

"Monsieur X. exists well enough," said the landlady, when we had inquired about him earlier in the day; "but I am not aware of his selling curiosities. However, as it is not far from here, you can do no harm by inquiring."

We followed her directions, which led us just beyond the more crowded part of the town into streets that were half country; where houses, few and far between, reposed in large gardens, surrounded by palings or substantial walls. It was all as complete a picture of still life as the neighbourhood of the harbour was the opposite.

At length we reached Monsieur X.'s gate, and boldly rang. A high wall surrounded a large garden, at the upper end of which stood a wide, low, picturesque house. A Brittany maid, in an inevitable Brittany cap, came flying down the paths in answer to our summons. Yes; M. X. was at home; would we give ourselves the trouble to enter.

She conducted us through the garden at a more sober pace, and we had time to admire the beauty and order of everything; the lovely old-fashioned flowers that adorn so many of the Breton gardens, and fill the air with fragrance. Somehow we felt that we had made a mistake; there was nothing of a commercial element about the place; it seemed essentially the abode of a man of taste and cultivation and of leisure moments.

We felt this still more upon entering the house. The rooms were low and large. Beams ran across the ceilings. Latticed panes gave a quaintness to the view without, and accorded well with the old-fashioned garden. The rooms were panelled with oak long black with age, and one unpanelled room was hung with excellent pictures. Rare old cabinets of carved woodwork adorned the rooms, whilst ancient silver and other ornaments added to their beauty. The house was distinguished by a mediæval atmosphere full of charm and repose and the calmness of life. One felt in another world, a by-gone age.

Presently the owner entered, and received us with great courtesy, with a certain old-world bearing that accorded well with his surroundings. We explained that we feared our visit was due to a misapprehension, and hoped he would not look upon us as intruders.

"On the contrary," he returned with a very polite bow and in very genuine tones; "I have a great partiality for Englishmen and it gives me much pleasure to receive you. I do not know how the report has spread abroad, but many others have come to me in the same way. My servant generally finds out the mistake, and the callers do not come in. They ask her point blank whether this is not an old curiosity shop and I a dealer in the same, and she is not pleased. I am glad the error was not explained in your instance," he politely added.

"The very sound of your bell, the very calmness and repose of your house and garden told us we had been misinformed," we replied.

SUNDAY IN BRITTANY.

"All we could do was to ask very humbly for an audience and explain our error in person."

"Whereby you much impressed my maiden," laughed Monsieur X., "who hurried to my atelier—I spend many of my leisure hours in painting—with the information that 'distinguished visitors' awaited me in the dining-room. I fear that too often those who call under the misapprehension, treat her a little brusquely. It may be partly the result of vexation and disappointment, but it must be admitted that the suaviter in modo of the past generation is not the *cachet* of most of the travellers of the present. Travelling was once my greatest pleasure, but I confess that after each fresh journey, be it long or short, I am more discontented with the crushing and crowding, the loudness of my fellow-pilgrims, and I appreciate more than ever the repose and seclusion of my little pied-à-terre."

"It could hardly be otherwise," we returned. "You would find it difficult to equal the charms of your home: of this fine collection, this old-world atmosphere, so full of a subdued refinement. We should indeed have lost much if our courage had failed and we had departed without seeing you. Such a collection is rare."

"It is the collection of a good many years," said Monsieur X. "I began thirty years ago, and in those days there was much to be found for the seeking. Brittany was almost unknown; few foreigners dreamed of paying us a visit; fewer still of collecting our bric-a-brac and rare old carvings. Thirty years ago a fortune might have been made in a very short time; it is all over now. From the north of Finistère to the south of Morbihan hardly anything remains to be discovered."

"And those who have their collections wisely keep them," we observed.

"Indeed, yes," returned Monsieur X. warmly. "They ought to become heirlooms. Every true collection should be looked upon as a 'monument historique.' Our little country has lost too many of its treasures. As it is, when some one dies and leaves no direct heir, or some great name becomes bankrupt, a sale takes place, and the labour and love of a century is scattered in an hour. I do not, for a moment, speak of such a collection as mine," he modestly added. "What I have is no doubt good, but like the size of my house it is limited. I allude to those collections that have become famous and are worth the trouble of a long journey. There are not many left."

Much more was said as he led us from room to room, and, on taking leave, escorted us through his garden at a very leisurely pace, plucking sweet marjoram and verbena for us as we sauntered down the paths.

"Pray let us renew our acquaintance if ever you return to Concarneau," he said very cordially, as we shook hands at the outer gate. "I find that people do visit it a second time. It is very bright and

picturesque, and the coup-d'œil of its harbour has few rivals. Here, at any rate, a welcome will await you. And though I am not a dealer in old curiosities," he laughed, "I may have a slight mania for them; but that is another and a costlier matter. A rivederci!"

Altogether, when the afternoon sun was declining, and we set out towards Quimper, we felt that our visit to this quaint old town had been a great, though too short success. Our landlady of the *Hôtel des Voyageurs* hoped we should return, begged us to recommend her. She declared that if we spent a week in Concarneau, we should only the more regret the end of our stay.

The drive back to Quimper was interesting and diverse. The road was lively with many people and carts—quaint carts and quaint costumes—most of them returning from Quimper to their various farms and villages. Occasionally we met an old woman driving a cow or a pig, and the Breton animals seemed to rival the Irish in obstinacy. Many brooks crossed our path and made musical the air. Near a dense wood we passed the old Commandery of the Moustoir, dating back to the thirteenth century. At last, as the shades of evening were beginning to gather, the skies to deepen in tone, the grey roofs of Quimper opened up in the distance, and rising above them like a beautiful vision, the spires of the cathedral pointed heavenwards. We thought of the Canon and Adrien, of a bygone delightful evening; and we wondered whether the grey look on the face of old André, the Suisse, had been a prophetic shadow.

## SONNET.

*From the Portuguese of Camoens.*

"Mudaô-se os têpos, mudaô-se as vôtades."

THE times change on, the dreams we loved to build,
Our being's self, our trust in others' truth—
All suffer change. The universe, in sooth,
Is formed of changes! and we see it filled
With endless novelty; but unfulfilled
Remain the visions once by Hope designed.
Evil leaves poignant memories behind;
Good (if it has been) yearnings never stilled.
Where the cold snow-flakes lay, a verdant fold
The hand of Time has laid, and my sweet song
I turn to mourning, dreading to behold,
Besides the changes of each passing day,
Another change more terrible and strong—
That nothing changes as it did of old!

ANNA H. DRURY.

# MISS EDITH'S CONQUEST.

By Ina Garvey.

THE ostensible motive for setting the bazaar project on foot was to make up the fund necessary to build new schools for Upstead Parish Church, the church scholars being in the unpleasant predicament of pursuing their studies in such a crazy old place that it threatened each day to tumble down and crush the young students as they gathered the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.

That was the *ostensible* reason for holding the Upstead Bazaar and Fancy Fair.

But traitors in the Upstead camp whispered that there was another reason—even a mightier one—for getting up that bazaar, viz., to give the young ladies of Upstead an opportunity for displaying ravishing toilettes and enjoying unlimited flirtation.

And, of a surety, the zeal which the Upstead fair ones showed in promoting the bazaar, in working articles for it, in buying articles for it, in making numberless journeys to Burlington, the nearest large town, on missions connected with it, in meeting perpetually at one another's houses and discussing it as their needles flew: that zeal, I say, was greater than one would have expected such giddy young things to manifest only in the cause of education and with the object of "elevating the masses."

"Those poor dear school-children!" cried Flossie Middleton, of the Grange. "Of course they must have a new schoolroom. Oh, what fun the bazaar will be! What a lovely dress I shall have for it! I quite love those children for wanting a schoolroom!"

The weather was lovely summer. The bazaar was to be held in the large grounds of Upstead Rectory. The three Miss Simpsons, the Rector's daughters, naturally occupied a prominent place among the promoters. And for visitors to the bazaar? Oh, the Upstead ladies had no fear that there would be any lack of visitors. It was to be but a one-day affair (an improvement in that respect upon most of its kind); and though Upstead was but a small place, was not Burlington three miles off? And was not Burlington a garrison town? Were not those dashing fellows, the Royal Scots Carbineers, quartered there? And might they not be seen any morning of the week marching through its streets, with their bagpipes playing, on their way to drill outside the town, and marching back to barracks at mid-day? And were not the young ladies of Burlington constantly exercised in their minds whether to admire the elegant and gallant officers of the Carbineers most as they marched through the streets with their men in the mornings, in all the fascinations of military braiding and

ouldered weapon ; or as, later in the day, they lounged in the same eets in mufti, with their high, snow-white collars, perfectly-fitting thes, killing hats and heart-breaking little canes ? Burlington had mised to support the Upstead bazaar—that is to say, the most portant part of Burlington, the Royal Scots Carbineers, had pro- sed. "Oh, they would certainly come. Most happy to do any- ng to help." The young ladies of Upstead went on working for e bazaar, and talking of it, and buying for it ; and at last the time opening it drew near. And, lo ! they could think of no one to rform that ceremony.

"We must have a Personage to open it," said the young ladies. A titled Personage, if possible. It will be a failure if not pro- rly opened ! "

But every one of importance for miles round happened to be away; lure seemed inevitable, and all the fair promoters went into mourn- g.

But suddenly their mourning was turned to the liveliest joy. For e Earl of Peterscourt arrived on a visit to his place near Upstead. pstead knew him not, for it was his first visit to Peterscourt since accession, some months before, to the title—but it knew *of* him. As a matter of fact, he was young, single, rich, a peer : as a matter faith, he was handsome, charming, delightful, talented, the glass of hion and the mould of form. He arrived at Peterscourt, near Up- ad. A daring spirit on the Bazaar Committee suggested : "Ask n to open it." He was asked, humbly and respectfully, in a Com- ttee letter in which the object of the bazaar and the perilous sition of the parish school-children was dwelt on. He consented, a polite note, to their request, and the Committee fell into rap- res.

It was the day before the Grand Bazaar and Fancy Fair to be held the grounds of Upstead Rectory.

At about five in the afternoon Miss Edith Brunton, one of the ding spirits of Upstead and among the most zealous of the bazaar pmoters, was in the drawing-room of Hazlewood Villa. Mrs. unton, an elderly widow, and of late years a confirmed invalid, lay her sofa near one of the windows. Beatrice Brunton, nine or ten rs older than Edith, sat working at the other window. This was e whole family—considered very nice people in Upstead, where ey had lived a year and more.

The disparity in years between Beatrice and Edith was accounted by Mrs. Brunton having lost three children, who had come between em, in infancy. Her husband had held a high military command India, and the fatal climate had withered the three baby lives.

"Well, mamma and Beatrice, so you really think I shall do ? You ink I shall make a useful and attractive stall-holder ? It doesn't ich matter, though, whether you think so or not—for the mirror ls me the same." And Edith Brunton twirled round and dropped

a low curtsey to her lovely reflection in the glass. "That's the best of a fancy fair; you may put on anything you've a mind to and not look conspicuous or out of place."

The dress she wore was an exquisite Indian silk, light and soft as gauze, made artistically with a sacque back; and with her great, fantastic plumed hat, she certainly was a wonderful picture.

"Frank Lyndon says he knows he shall spend all his money at my stall," she laughed; "but he needn't be frightened; I shall waste very little of my sweetness on him and his brother-officers; there'll be higher game to bring down."

"Fie, Edith!" exclaimed Mrs. Brunton languidly. "You let your spirits run away with you, my darling. What *do* you mean?"

"Mamma, you know well enough what I mean. You know Lord Peterscourt opens the bazaar; I think it not improbable that the cigar-divan under my care may prove attractive to his lordship."

"What nonsense you talk, child," said her mother, looking admiringly at her.

"You know you don't *really* think so, mamma. You know you quite approve of my having registered a solemn vow to make a captive of Lord Peterscourt. As I said yesterday to Julia Croker, it is my turn now. Beatrice had her turn; a much jollier one than will fall to my share; years ago in India, when papa was alive and we were rich and important. Beattie had the gayest of times then, and might have carried out her career brilliantly. I was a small child in England in those days, but I wish *my* turn had come then—or that those days could come again. I think it's very hard that *my* turn came when papa had died, and mamma had turned immovable."

"I would rather you did not discuss me with Julia Croker or anyone else," said Beatrice, with gentle dignity, looking up from some embroidery she was finishing.

"Oh, dear me! I have no wish to discuss you, I'm sure! You're quite sufficiently in my way as it is. I often think it's a little hard for a girl to have to go about with a sister so much older than she is. It makes people think *me* older than I am. Just fancy! You are twenty eight—quite an old maid!"

Beatrice said nothing. She rose, stepped through the open French window, and went away into the garden with her work.

"There goes my lady in a temper, I suppose," said Edith.

"I think, my darling," remarked the doting mother, "that you tease Beatrice a good deal about her age."

"Of course, I am always in the wrong! I wish I'd had half the chances *she's* had. When she had so many opportunities years ago in India in papa's time, she might have established herself splendidly, and been a help to me now. Instead of which she's only a hindrance to my prospects—an old-maid sister! And all because she chose to set her heart on a poor lieutenant in the Lancers, who presumed to fall in love with General Brunton's

aughter. Was Archie Milroy so very handsome, mamma?" asked Miss Edith presently, tapping on the window-pane with the tips of her ngers, and looking out into the garden.

"I believe he was considered so—but there, don't speak to me of hat wretched affair, child. I'm not strong enough to bear mortifying eminiscences. I only wish that foolish girl had never seen him." And Mrs. Brunton sniffed at her vinaigrette.

"Well, mamma, I'm going to make up to you for Beattie's foolish- ess and obstinacy. You shall have *one* daughter a credit to you. f Lord Peterscourt is like the generality of his sex, he shall not leave he Fancy Fair heart-whole to-morrow evening."

She was certainly a beautiful creature. The exquisite material and rtistic shape of her gown set off her graceful figure to the utmost: he great hat, with its smoke-like floating feathers, seemed to heighten very charm of the fair face, with its large brown eyes, and its fram- ng of rich, curling, golden-brown hair.

"And now I must run and take off my finery, or it won't look resh to-morrow!" And she disappeared from the room.

After what we have just heard, it is scarcely necessary to premise hat Edith Brunton was selfish, vain and ill-natured. She was, n truth, one of those who, not content with possessing Nature's choicest gifts, must needs try to aggravate the unhappy lot of such of ner sex as did not possess them. Out in the full sunshine herself, she was not satisfied unless she had increased the discomfort of those who sat in the gloomy, chilly shade. Her own sex in general dreaded her. With her great beauty of face and form, her cleverness, ner capacity for saying the cruellest and most cutting things, her overweening and aggressive vanity, she was one before whom most young women struck their colours; and though hating her, they must do it silently, for hatred of a beauty is bad form, and always gets set down to jealousy.

What a contrast was Beatrice Brunton to her sister! Tall, stately, dark-haired Beatrice, with her handsome pale face and deep-blue eyes. Even in the first flush of her youth, admired and courted, she had been so kind and gentle—had never cared to triumph meanly over ner plainer friends. "Not so clever as Edith," had long been the verdict on her, and she had accepted it quietly and meekly. Not hat Beatrice Brunton was wanting in spirit. Years ago her father nd mother had had but too strong proofs to the contrary. Those were the days when Beatrice was surrounded with admirers. Gay times those. Beatrice, a blooming beauty in her teens—Edith, a little child in England with her aunts—times in which fair Beattie never dreamed of later days in which an upstart sister, grown to womanhood herself, should gibe and goad at her as "an old maid."

And out of all her crowd of admirers Archie Milroy, a young Lieutenant in the Lancers, had won her heart. Archie, who, though well-connected, had nothing in the world but his good looks, his

manly, faithful heart, and his slender pay, had dared to fall in lov with General Brunton's beautiful daughter. He was sent to th right-about by the General—an ambitious, worldly man—in such fashion, that he was not likely to renew the attack. Only two mor of those countless loving hearts that have been torn apart b Mammon.

But though they could drive poor Beatrice's chosen lover awa they could not force her to take one to their liking. In spite o their anger and their reproaches, she persisted in refusing the mos advantageous offers. When General Brunton's health failed, and th family came to England, Beatrice felt that her last hope of seein Archie again was gone. The General had a six months' leave—bu he took a much longer one, for he died in England. And th family's palmiest days died with him—a fact much fretted over after wards by Miss Edith as most unfair to herself. Mrs. Brunton had fairly good property of her own, and the General had some smal private means: they were still very comfortably off. Mrs. Brunton always a delicate woman, had been quite an invalid for the last few years. She required much nursing and assiduous attention, and this all fell to Beatrice.

"Beattie is fitted for that sort of thing," said Edith; or, if she did not say it in so many words, thought it and acted it. "She doesn't feel it as she would if she were ten years younger. As she hasn't married, she must expect to have all that sort of thing to do *I* have my career to make—it's not likely I'm going to lose my com plexion and spoil my nerves waiting on an invalid—of course mamma wouldn't wish it. No—Beattie had her turn years ago in India—it's *my* turn now, a poor one enough compared with hers—but such as it is I must make the very most of it."

And so she went out and about, accepted this invitation and that stayed with friends as often as they would have her—and left tall stately, gentle Beatrice to do all the home-duties and to attend upon the mother whose thoughts were always with her darling Edith.

Beatrice was good and uncomplaining, and bore the burden of life that must have been unhappy, very bravely. But there were times when her heart failed a little—and the night before the Grand Bazaar and Fancy Fair was one of these. Edith had been particularly trying to her all day—particularly rude and insulting; and the vain, bold speeches about the expected conquest of this much-talked-o Lord Peterscourt at to-morrow's bazaar had been almost intolerable to bear in silence.

"If she were married and away—if only she were married and away!" thought Beatrice, as she sat at her window that night and looked out into the summer darkness. "I am afraid it is wrong to feel so to a sister; but I seem sometimes as if I could not stand it much longer."

She sat musing at the window for some time—then rose and went

to a small writing-case on a table, unlocked it, and from a private drawer drew a slip of paper which she gazed on long and sadly. How well she remembered the finding, in a bouquet, of that little slip of paper—the only memento she possessed of her time of love and happiness—and the fluttering of heart it caused her. There had been a little coolness between the as-yet-unconfessed lovers—a dance too many given to a rival, or some such trifle, its foundation—and when the flowers came she searched amongst them for a message, and her heart leapt as she discovered the note.

"Will you bring these flowers to the ball to-night? I shall know then that I am forgiven." Surely that time is not gone! She is still at the ball—the crash and wail of the brass music in her ears, the measured tread of the waltzers, and the rustle and sweep of the dresses: and she is flying round with the crowd, her nineteen-year-old heart throbbing with life and joy, her hand on some one's shoulder, and some one's dear voice whispering, "How can I thank you for bringing my flowers, and ending my misery by forgiving me?"

No, no; that night is gone, indeed; buried beneath many a hard, lonely year. The joyful girl-heart has long been a sorrowful one; the brightness of the girl-beauty is dimmed; and it is a pale, sad Beatrice that bends over that well-worn slip of paper and cries as she presses her lips to it: "Archie—Archie! they were cruel to part us! We might have been so happy!"

The Bazaar was in full swing. The grounds of Upstead Rectory were large and pretty. The principal stalls—lightly rigged-up canvas affairs—were in a long row; others were dotted about separately. Here were the three Miss Simpsons at the refreshment stall, driving a better trade than Miss Edith Brunton predicted they would do. Here was Miss Flossie Middleton from the Grange, dispensing, with the aid of three coadjutors, cut flowers, button-holes, bouquets, plants in pots and brilliant smiles to all and sundry. Here was Miss Ledbury, a "Church-worker," indefatigable and undaunted, with a flopping hat and spectacles, presiding over a stall of needlework, and somewhat ignored by the mass of the visitors. Here was Mrs. Harding, the doctor's wife, at her stall of toys, assisted by her two little girls. Here were many other stalls full of articles that no one ever could possibly require. Here, last, but not least, was the little cigar-divan whose chief presiding goddess was Edith Brunton; and here was Edith in the midst of her enjoyment and her triumph. All day the divan had been thronged with customers, and she had chattered and laughed with them to her own and their heart's content. But now—now, she had ears and eyes for none save one; now might the gay youths who stood round her counter draw off in despair. A good-looking young man, dressed quietly but stylishly, had just purchased from her the daintiest of cigarette-cases, embroidered with

forget-me-nots by her own hand and filled with the choicest "Khedives." He had given her a five-pound note in payment and declined any change; and she, in a flutter of joy and triumph over her last and longed-for conquest, was saying in soft tones, with the dark eye-lashes showing off to full advantage: "If you pay so handsomely for it, Lord Peterscourt, you must let me work your monogram or initials or something on it. I would try to do it very nicely."

The day wore on and the goods went off. In the slack intervals of business, fair stall-holders fled over to each other and compared their "takings." Dear Flossie ran over to dear Edith to ask what the latter's receipts amounted to: and it turning out that dear Edith's takings amounted to a good many pounds more than dearest Flossie's, dearest Flossie was profuse in her loving congratulations; went back to her stall in bitter ire, and was rude to old Dr. Simpson when he asked the price of a small, cheap plant in a pot.

The day wore on and the goods went off. The three Miss Simpsons got rather tired—were a little short with their hungry customers—and were downright hard on the two curates who were helping them, and who had almost paralysed their right arms cutting a great deal more bread-and-butter than was wanted. And as the day wore on and the goods went off, a feeling became rife in the bosoms of several fair shop-keepers that Edith Brunton was an odious girl; that she had set her odious trap to catch that sweet, delightful, handsome Earl of Peterscourt! and, oh, crowning guilt and shame!—that she had succeeded! In which latter opinion, Miss Edith, with a bright, hard, triumphant glance round at them all, and a smile that it maddened them to see and to have to return, fully coincided.

"No, Beatrice. It is no use asking me to go to bed. I must sit up till dear Edith's return. I want to hear all about the bazaar and how the dear child enjoyed herself."

Thus had Mrs. Brunton answered all her elder daughter's entreaties that she would retire, and thus she continued to answer though her bed-time was long past. From time to time she fell asleep on her sofa, and each time, on waking, she was crosser—not with the absent Edith, the cause of her fatigue, but with the good, gentle Beatrice, who had been her companion all day as usual, and for whom a visit to the gay scene in the rectory grounds had not been dreamed of.

At last Edith was heard outside saying good-night to a party of neighbours, and in another moment she had floated, all smiles and flushes and excitement, into the drawing-room.

"What! You two still up? Goodness gracious, Beattie! why didn't mamma go to bed at her usual hour?"

"I wanted to see you, darling, on your return," said the mother, all her crossness and sleepiness vanished. "Tell me all about it, Edith."

Edith tossed off her great plumed hat, and fluttered up and down in front of the mirror, reviewing her charming self and her lovely dress.

"And now for your congratulations," she cried, turning to her mother and sister. "All has gone off brilliantly. I've taken almost double what any of the other stall-holders have. They're all so jealous, and they hate me so, the dear things! And I've had the most glorious day that ever was."

"And—the Earl—was he there?" questioned Mrs. Brunton.

Her daughter laughed gaily. "Yes, indeed! And I shouldn't have said I had had a glorious day if I hadn't taken him captive, bound hand and foot, helpless and at my mercy."

"Edith!" remonstrated the admiring mother. Beatrice went on reading, and did not seem much interested in the account of the day's triumph.

"Mother, it's all true! I've succeeded beyond my hopes. I've sent an arrow straight into his lordship's heart. He came—he saw—but *I* conquered."

She sat down by her mother's sofa. Her mood was the gayest, and, for once, she seemed inclined to leave Beatrice in peace.

"I don't wonder he admired you, child," said the widow, looking at the brilliant cheeks and eyes of her lovely daughter.

"It's something more than admiration," said the young lady, nodding wisely. "I can see that Lord Peterscourt is not a flirt, like Frank Lyndon or Captain Hansard, and when he seems as much interested in a girl as he was in me from the moment he was introduced, something is pretty sure to come of it. Mamma, we were quite like old friends before we parted. That stupid Lady Adamson had made him promise to dine with them, and carried him off almost by force—I know he hated going! But, as I said, we were like old friends. I found myself telling him all about my affairs—that I had an invalid mother, and a sister a great many years older than myself—and how long we had lived at Upstead, and all about us—and there was he listening and leaning on my counter, and all the girls mad with jealousy. When I asked him how long he meant to stay at Peterscourt, he said, in a dreamy voice, 'I only came for a few days, but I shall stay longer than that now.' And oh, mamma, he's coming to call to-morrow."

"To-morrow! so soon!" exclaimed the mother.

"Yes. He'll come, of course, just about the time for afternoon tea. My programme is this: You, mamma, on your sofa (he knows you're an invalid) in your best dress and cap—the pink-and-gold tea-set on the gipsy-table—Beattie in her lavender cashmere pouring out the tea—me, in one of my white muslin tea-gowns, with the blue let in under the lace insertion, seated gracefully on that sofa by the window, with a dainty piece of work or a book. That is what he is to see when he is shown in. He will bring his tea and sit by me on

the sofa, and we shall keep up the conversation chiefly. You and Beattie can join in from time to time just to support me, you know. And before he goes, mamma, you'll find an opportunity to invite him at an early date. Beattie, you jealous thing; don't pretend you're absorbed in that book; why don't you look up and take some interest in the day's triumph? Though you're past all this yourself, you might have some sympathy, I should have thought, with my affairs."

"I hardly think you go the right way to win anyone's sympathy, Edith, since you ask me for mine," replied Beatrice.

"Well, I'll not be so stupid as to ask you for yours again. What young girl can expect sympathy from a cross, disappointed old maid?"

Beatrice looked at her quietly. "The unfailing gibe, Edith. Supposed to be the bitterest there is, no doubt, and therefore always chosen. Thinking my lot a particularly hard and hopeless one, you do all in your power to make it more so. Well, it is the way of the world." And Beatrice left the room.

At about ten o'clock the following morning Beatrice Brunton, with gardening gloves on and a large apron over her fresh white morning gown, was in the little greenhouse that opened from the landing above the drawing-room flight of stairs at Hazlewood Villa. The ferns in the greenhouse were her care and pride. As she snipped and clipped and watered, the occupation and movement brought a colour to her beautiful cheek and a lustre to her deep-blue eye; her dark curling hair strayed upon her forehead, and was plaited behind. Never, perhaps, had she looked fairer, even in the flush of her first youth.

A ring came at the bell while she was thus busy; but not heeding it she went on with her work, and was unaware that any visitor had been admitted below. A servant entered the greenhouse and announced Lord Peterscourt. Beatrice looked at her; threw down her gardening implements in astonishment. "Lord Peterscourt!" she ejaculated. "At this hour of the morning! How very strange! Where is Miss Edith?"

"In bed and asleep, miss," answered the maid.

Beatrice went to her sister's room and entered it. Edith lay smiling in her sleep, dreaming, perhaps, of the triumphs of the day before. But when roused and told of the visitor, she became suddenly as wide awake as if her eyes had not been closed for hours.

"Called at this hour of the day! What does he mean by it? What shall I do? If only I were all ready and dressed!" She proceeded rapidly with her toilette. "But to think of his being kept waiting! Beattie, help me at this pinch if you have any sisterly feeling. I know I've been nasty to you at times, but forget it all like a good Christian, and stand by me now. You must go down, introduce yourself to him, and play the benevolent elder sister till I come. Talk to him, you know, in your staid, elderly way. You've quite a

colour this morning," she added, glancing rather grudgingly at the tinge in Beatrice's cheek.

"I've been gardening," said the latter. "I suppose I have no business with a colour," and she laughed a little.

"Nonsense, Beattie! Don't be absurd."

"Well, if I must go down, I hope you'll come soon."

"As soon as ever I can. Thank you, Beattie. By the way, you might leave me that rose in your dress; it would just finish me off, and I haven't time to get one for myself."

Beatrice smiled as she removed the red rose she wore from the body of her white dress, took off her gardening apron, and went downstairs.

She passed softly across the hall, entered the drawing-room, closing the door behind her. The sun-blinds were down before the windows, the room was shady. The summer breeze came in and shook the curtains.

Lord Peterscourt was standing by the table, his back towards her, bending over a photograph album. He had not heard her approach. Beatrice advanced.

"My mother wishes me to ——"

Lord Peterscourt started—stood erect—turned his face to her.

"Archie! Is it—oh! is it *really* Archie?"

But before she had finished asking the wild question, two arms were clasping her close, and then a voice, long unheard, whispered: "Yes, dear and only love! It is Archie, who has found you at last, and is never going to be sent away from you again."

When their agitation and her wonder were a little subsided, she heard his story: How faithful he had been to her whose parents had driven him away from her—how, after she left India and returned with her father and mother to England, he had lost all tidings of her, save a rumour, two years later, of her marriage—how he had felt that no other woman could ever occupy his heart, and that her memory must be his only life-companion—how he had found life but a sorry business, and had half hoped when he served through the Afghan war that the dart so often hurled at his comrades might come his way. And, with regard to the earldom? Well, Archie Milroy had been far enough from it in those old Indian days, but the unexpected deaths of two cousins had made him heir to his great-uncle, the last earl. At the aged nobleman's request, his heir had come to England the preceding winter to pay him a visit; but when Archie arrived at the Earl's town-house in Berkeley Square, he found that his relative had had a stroke of paralysis, to which he succumbed a few days later, and Archie found himself a wealthy peer.

"But what was it all to me," he said, "with a desolate heart. I could only think, 'if this had come years ago, they would have given her to me.' All seemed hollow and empty. I took but small pleasure in my 'honours' as they are called. I had often thought

of cutting the world, and then when I came down to Peterscourt, and the people here asked me to open their bazaar, I sorely wanted to get out of doing it; but they seemed as if they would take no refusal, so I went. And there I saw a face like my lost love's—only not so lovely. It was your sister's. I was introduced to her; from her I learned that my lost darling was found again, and was still mine." (Poor Edith! So this was your boasted conquest!) "Beattie," and he looked tenderly and penetratingly into her violet blue eye, and his hand touched gently the fair cheek, "my gentle, patient love. Perhaps I can guess a little of what you have had to bear."

Beatrice's eyes fell and her cheeks flushed; for it seemed as if he guessed, in some mysterious manner, something of what she had suffered from Edith. She said nothing; only her drooping head lay on his heart; and presently she murmured: "Archie! Archie! have you really come back to me? Oh! the long, sad, lonely years that have come between us—how could I live them?" And her tears rained down for the sorrow that was past as much as for the joy that was present

When Miss Edith fluttered down in her embroidered white frock, with the damask rose she had taken from her sister fastened in the bodice, her great brown eyes bright with excitement, and a smile of the sweetest welcome on her fair face, she received the greatest shock it had ever been her lot to suffer.

Her grand castle in the air, it seemed, had been jerry-built: as she stepped in to take up her abode there, it fell upon her and crushed her—crushed, let us hope, some of the vanity and conceit out of her.

To think that this Earl's interest in her had been merely on account of her relationship to Beattie. To think that Beattie, who had heard all her boasts—Beattie, at whom she had gibed and jeered—was going to be the Countess, not herself. To think that——And here, shut into her own room, she broke down, and shed many bitter tears.

I own I am pleased at the picture she makes sitting there weeping—at the mortification she so richly deserved.

# HÄNCHEN'S WOOING.

"DO you say that Romance is dead nowadays, and that nobody falls in love at first sight? Oh, no! that may be the case in England, but not in Germany. Did I ever tell you of my Hänchen's wooing? No? Then you shall hear and judge for yourself."

The Frau Doktor straightened herself on her slippery sofa; her blue eyes shone and her wrinkled cheeks took a little colour, like the faint pink of a faded sweet-pea; her thin voice had a note of anticipating triumph.

"All my girls had married," she began, "and married well—all except Hänchen. Ida married her cousin, and Adelheit married his best friend who came to her sister's marriage. Heléne was cut out for a Pfarrer's wife, and took Pastor Schultz six months after his poor wife died (there were so many children he could not wait); and Friedel would have Ernst Crämers and nobody else—they had played together at man and wife ever since they were babies. Then there was only Hänchen left, and she was no beauty. My man would often say to me: 'Be content, Mütterchen; you have married four daughters out of five, and that is a long way over the average'—my man has such a business-like way of talking.

"But all the same I longed for Hänchen to marry. She was not intellectual like Ida, nor beautiful like Adelheit, nor economical like Heléne, nor a regular little witch like Friedel; only, thank God, none of my girls was quite without good looks and quick wits, and I had brought them up to be good managers and to know how to make a man comfortable, which is, after all, the chief charm. Nevertheless, Hänchen was twenty-six and still single.

"Then there came an invitation from her school friend, Lisa Löhrling, that she should go and stay at Cologne, and make the acquaintance of Lisa's bridegroom. I thought very likely the Löhrlings wanted her to help sew at the bride's things, but I was glad she should go, for it was dull at home, and one wedding makes many. When I said that to her father he was angry and said: 'Max Löhrling was quartered at Deütz, and that one lieutenant in the family was enough for him' (it was Ernst Crämer's fine blue jacket that Friedel lost her heart to, the puss!). But I made him hold his tongue and say none of this nonsense before Hänchen, and in the end he gave her a hundred-mark bank note and put her into the Ladies Coupé himself.

"Now what happened on this visit I did not learn all at once, but I have put it together from different things that I have gathered from different people, and it all goes to prove what I have always held true: if a girl is ordained to marry, the right man will find her, even if he comes down the chimney.

"The Löhrlings came to meet her at Cologne station, Max and Lisa, and they had brought a carriage to drive her and her box home. 'Now, Max, off with you,' said Lisa; 'and don't let us see you again till nine o'clock; Hänchen and I have a great deal to talk about, and she will be tired with her long journey and will not care about seeing strangers, so keep him away till then.'

"'Is it your Bräutigam?' asked Hänchen; 'pray do not send him away on my account.'

"'Oh, no,' Lisa explained as they drove along; 'it is a friend of Max's, a Herr von Passau, who telegraphed this morning that he would come to-night and stay for a few days. He has inherited a property in North Germany and he is on his road to see it. I believe he stops here to see if Max can get leave to accompany him. But we do not want him with us your first evening, so I told Max to take him to a restaurant and give him supper, and later he can bring him. I want you all to myself.'

"What a talk the girls had—about Albrecht, Lisa's Bräutigam, and all the work there was to be done. When the gentlemen came in and Max introduced his friend von Passau to his mother and sister and their guest, they could not believe that it was already nine o'clock.

"'Well, no, it isn't,' confessed Max, 'but it is full moon and such a warm night, and there is music playing in the Flora Garten; Von Passau and I thought we would fetch you to drink a glass of beer there. You must excuse us that it is only eight o'clock, but we could not live any longer without you.'

"Of course the girls were delighted, Frau Löhrling put on her bonnet and took them all to the Flora.

"Max walked with his mother and the lady-guest, and Lisa with her brother's friend, and talked to him about his new property; and she thought he seemed a dull fellow, for when she asked him if he meant to live on his new property, he blushed and stammered, and said he could not decide for a few days. By-and-bye, in the gardens, as they sat at supper—for the ladies were persuaded to try some ham and some little brödchen with their glasses of beer—they touched glasses altogether, and Lisa said joking, 'Herr von Passau you must touch with Fräulein Hellmuth, for you know the friends of our friends are our friends,' and so they bowed and touched glasses together, too.

"As von Passau and Max walked home that night the stranger suddenly asked: 'Do you interest yourself for that young lady, Max?'

"'I? Who? What young lady?' cried Max astonished.

"'Fräulein—ah—Hellmuth.'

"'Not I,' quoth Max. 'She is my sister's friend, but I hardly know her; her sister Friedel, I remember, was a jolly girl, but this one I scarcely have spoken to any more than yourself.'

"'That is well,' said von Passau; 'then I shall not do you any

wrong if I offer for her. I should like her beyond anything for my wife.'

"Max could only think his friend had gone mad. Now I must stop here," said the Frau Doktor, "to repeat again that my Hänchen was no beauty. She was medium height and rather plump, as a German girl should be; she had blue eyes and light-brown hair which she wore in one thick plait, put round the top of her head like a crown. She had bought a pretty blue foulard costume with her father's present, and had had her good handsome dress of green tartan, English stuff, all done up with new velvet, and a new Tuscan straw hat, with bunches of lilies of the valley, went with both, and suited her wonderfully well. She wore the English dress that evening, for it was a little chilly sitting out, and next day, when they all went to Düsseldorf by the steamboat, she wore the blue. Now on the way as they went, Herr von Passau announced that he had just received a letter from his lawyer, and he must go North to his property at once, and he thought perhaps it would be as well to start that evening from Düsseldorf, as time pressed. 'I cannot persuade Max to go with me, Gnädige Frau,' said he, 'so I must go by myself, a lonely bachelor,' and he sighed deeply.

"'You must find a wife soon, Herr von Passau,' said Frau Löhrling. You see she could speak easily, for Lisa was busy.

"'I have seen one,' he answered, 'but she does not know it,' which made everyone laugh.

"In spite of the lawyer's letter, von Passau did not travel North that night. He kept putting off, and putting off while they rambled about the town, saying each time that a later train would serve him quite well, till at last there was only the last one back to Cologne, and they all returned from their day's pleasuring together—von Passau taking it very quietly, and saying that he could start early next morning. When they got back to the Löhrling's house, there was Albrecht arrived, and they took a little supper. 'That friend of Max's is in love with your friend, Lischen,' whispered the Bräutigam, after half an hour.

"'Nonsense!' said Lischen, who could not think of anyone being in love but herself. 'He has not spoken ten words to her, and they only met yesterday evening,' for Max, fearing his friend should be laughed at, had told his sister nothing.

"'Nevertheless, he loves her; trust me. I am in love myself and know,' answered Albrecht.

"'Bah!' said Lisa, 'I tell you they have not spoken together for five minutes, and Hänchen is not so wonderfully beautiful! I will tell you what—suppose I go to the door and just listen for a minute,' for by this time the two guests had gone into the salon together, while Albrecht was helping Lisa to lock up after supper, and Frau Löhrling had gone upstairs.

"She crept quietly to the door, and listened—then she came back

shaking her head. 'You are too romantic, mein Herr,' said she, 'they are now for the first time alone together, and they are talking of the pickpockets in the Dom Kirche.'

"Nevertheless, Albrecht only shook his head.

"Next morning Herr von Passau really did start for the North. When Hänchen came to breakfast at eight o'clock, she heard that he called quite early, before anyone was up, and had left his cards, 'one for you, too, Hänchen,' said Frau Löhrling, counting them out.

"When my girl came back from her visit," continued the Frau Doktor, taking a fresh skein of wool, and dexterously twitching it over her left arm, as she started on a fresh phase of her story and her knitting, "I thought I never had seen her looking so ill, and so unlike herself. 'Visiting does not suit her,' I said to myself, remembering how Friedel used to look like a fresh rose when she came back from her aunt at Wiesbaden, and what spirits even our quiet Heléne would be in after a visit to Wetzlar. Then I began to fear: 'has she a misplaced affection, an unfortunate attachment?' and I was quite miserable to think that perhaps while I had been praying the good God to give her earthly happiness, He had thought fit to visit her with such a trial as this. I did my best to discover from her what had happened during her visit to Cologne, but beyond a general idea of the Löhrling family life, I learnt nothing—no mention of anyone in particular, no consciousness at mentioning Max's name, only a melancholy, an abstractedness that I could not account for. Her father said, 'She is spoilt with the gay town life,' but I said 'No, it can't be that,' for if she had been set up with town fancies, she would never have been so careless about her dress as to walk out one day with a black glove and a grey, and never notice it!

"It was love, I was sure, and an unfortunate love, I was afraid.

"One day, when she had been home about a month, my man came in, in a pretty taking, with a letter in his hand.

"'Look at this,' said he; 'here is a fellow that I have never heard of asking my consent to his marrying our Hänchen! Do you know anything about it?'

"'Not I. What is his name?'

"'Passau—von Passau, too—he says he met her at Löhrlings'.'

"'So—o. I have not heard her mention him. Has he spoken to her at all?'

"'He says not. It is a most extraordinary thing; let us call the girl and ask her.'

"Hänchen came in at that moment; she had been gardening and her hands were full of flowers while her face bore a strange, dreamy expression as if her mind was far away. Her father asked:

"'Hänchen, who is Herr Eduard von Passau?' without preamble.

"'There was a Herr von Passau, a friend of Max Löhrling, who stayed for a few days in Cologne. I do not know if his name is Eduard.'

"'You met him at the Löhrlings'?'

"'Yes, father.'

"'Did you like him?'

"'Why—yes, but I saw him only twice, and we scarcely spoke together at all.'

"'He has written to ask my consent to his paying you his addresses.'

"'His what?'

"'His addresses—don't you know what that means? He wants to marry you.'

"'Me!' and poor, modest Hänchen ran out of the room with her hands before her face.

"'Had you no idea of this, Herzchen?' I asked her later. 'We have thought you changed and melancholy since you came home, and I feared perhaps that you had seen somebody you felt you could love who did not return your preference—was it not so?'

"'Indeed, no, mamachen,' answered Hänchen earnestly; 'if I have seemed altered it was only because—oh, you will think me so silly if I tell you ——' and she hid her face behind my shoulder.

"'Nay, then, why should I?'

"'Because I had seen Lisa Löhrling with her Bräutigam and it looked so beautiful, so full of happiness to love and be loved like that; and I thought, I am not pretty or clever, no one is ever likely to want to love me so. The feeling was strong upon me when I came home, and I struggled against it, for I knew I was discontented—but, oh mother, I did not guess you had seen it.'

"'A mother's eyes see most things,' said I, pressing her to me, 'and you did not guess either what was in store for you, eh, Hänchen?'

"But to that she made no answer.

"Two days later Hänchen and I stood at the window that looks down the road to the station; my man had gone to Cologne to meet Herr von Passau, at his earnest request, and if papa liked the young man, and if he approved of his manners and appearance, he was to bring him home to spend the evening with us. I was more excited even than Hänchen. I had tried to get her to describe Herr von Passau that I might judge a little of the impression he would make on my husband, who is a very intelligent man, but beyond the fact that Max Löhrling's friend was a tall man, and dark, with a fine beard and an impressive manner, my daughter could not or would not say anything.

"'Spectacles?' I asked anxiously, as we stood looking out of the window. We had heard the train whistle five minutes before, and knew that they must be approaching, but thought there was just time to ask that, for spectacles make a man look so much more important.

"'I don't know—nay, I think a double eye-glass,' said Hänchen. 'A—ah!' and she sat down suddenly, without another word.

"Her father had turned the corner alone.

"I did not dare look at Hänchen. I thought she would be better left alone for a little, so out I flew to my man, who was hanging up his paletot in the entry.

"'Ach leider!' said I. 'I see he won't do at all, and you have had your journey for nothing, my Karl. Well, it is a sad disappointment, but, thank God, we don't want to lose our girl for many a year yet, and rather than give her to anyone who is unsatisfactory and unworthy——'

"'What are you talking about?' answered Karl. 'He is a capital fellow, and I like him very much. He gave me an excellent dinner at Bettgers', and I told him to come on here by the next train. I thought you would be glad of a little time to prepare. Why, what in the world are you crying about? I thought I had done everything to please you.'"

"Next day we arranged to go to Stoltzenfels. We could not drive, or all the neighbours would have guessed what was a-foot, and Herr von Passau had not yet spoken to Hänchen, or done more than watch her as she went about her household duties. So we decided to meet at the station, and the young man gave me his arm, while Hänchen and her father went to take the tickets. Now, thought I, he will say something to me (and there is nothing sweeter to a mother than to hear her daughter's praises—it is the finest flattery). But just then up came Herr Beck and his wife and sister, bound for Kreuznach, and in a moment I had my hand out from under his arm.

"'Where are you going, liebe Frau Doktor?' cried Frau Beck, so that all the station could hear, and I was so flustered that I answered, 'I don't know,' in an idiotic fashion, which, to anyone less absorbed in her own affairs, would have revealed the whole secret. Luckily, Frau Beck had a great deal to say.

"'Go away, go away into another carriage,' I managed to whisper to Herr von Passau, while our neighbours swept us along to the waiting-room. The others had come up with the tickets by this time, and, quickly comprehending the situation, my man announced that he had taken tickets for Stoltzenfels, where he was taking us for a little treat; and Herr von Passau, with ready tact, lifted his hat and strolled to the further end of the train.

"'We shall just fill a carriage; how delightful!' cried Frau Beck, for the twentieth time. 'We are going to Kreuznach, and your good company, so far, will be a great help on the way. Why should you not come on, and stop the night? It would do you all good, I am sure. Where is your friend, Frau Doktor, who was with you just now? You did not introduce him. I hope he did not want to travel in your society.'

"'A mere new acquaintance,' I stammered.

"'That is all right, he had the good sense to leave old friends

together. Hänchen, you are looking pale, my love ; you had better persuade the good mother to send you to Kreuznach to me, eh, don't you think so?'

"'I beg your pardon?'

"'You had better come with us ; it is such a gay place in the season, and Theresa, here, would be delighted to have a companion. Do you know it at all?'

"Hänchen stared in bewilderment. I knew she had not been listening to a word, and I rushed to her help as I best might. 'Hänchen has only just come home from a visit to Cologne ; we cannot spare her to go to Kreuznach just now,' I said, with emphasis on the name that she might recover herself, and I kept up the ball of conversation as well as I could till we reached Stoltzenfels and had to alight.

"'The best view of the castle is just at this point from the other end of the carriage ; Fräulein Theresa ought not to miss seeing it,' said my man, who can be as sharp as a needle when he chooses ; and having left all the Becks with their heads out of the opposite window, we slipped off the platform with Herr von Passau closely following. What a thing it is to have tact!

"In the evening, as we strolled down from the castle, the way grew narrow and dark under the thick boughs, and my man gave me his arm while Herr von Passau came behind with Hänchen beside him. They were close to us, and I looked back once and heard him telling her that as he came through Cologne he had read in the *Gazette* that the pickpockets that had so long infested the Dom Kirche had been captured and punished. Next time I turned to look, a wind in the path had hidden them from my sight. 'Come on, come on,' said my man, who was getting fidgety for his supper ; 'they are all right now.'

"And as we stood waiting for them on the balcony of the restaurant below, they came out of the wood arm-in-arm.

"That was love at first sight, was it not?" concluded the Frau Doktor. "On Eduard's part without a doubt, for Max Löhrling told me afterwards of what he had said on that very first evening ; and on Hänchen's part, too, I believe, though the dear child was too modest and unassuming to know what the feeling was. It is a wonderful thing, this love : all-powerful, all-conquering, not to be gainsaid if——

"Excuse me, Fräulein, one instant. I think I hear that soldier again in the kitchen with Trüdchen, and if so, there will not be a scrap of veal worth slicing for supper."

G. B. Stuart.

## THE SMILE.

I AM a knight of the road; in less euphonious language, a city bagman; and having lately returned to town after a week's hard work by day and railway jolting by night, I found myself on the very evening of my return obliged to present myself at a city dinner.

My commercial travels have not as yet brought me fortune. The "costly hansom," much more wheels of my own, are still beyond me. Nevertheless "I am contented with my fate—an omnibus suffices me." It was accordingly in this humble but convenient vehicle that I ensconced myself wearily, and we proceeded to rumble city-wards.

It was a wettish night; raw, and with a treacherous wind that shoved itself past the conductor, wound sinuously among the knees and skirts of the other passengers, and roamed coolly, coldly even, up the legs of my dress trousers. The wood pavements that hurried away in serpentine curves behind us gleamed like looking-glass, wherein shop-lights, street-lights, the red lamps of the retiring hansom dropped reflections, long and tremulous as those of stars in a river; and the other reflections dropped by my left-hand neighbour, when the twelfth passenger got in and placed a large and muddy boot upon his tenderest corn, brought my mind back with a jump from poetical similes to the actual present. We were "full up," and the conductor signified the same by a postman's ring to his partner on the box.

We stopped, started again, jolted on and again stopped, after the manner of the ordinary omnibus; and too tired to think, I studied languidly the appearance of my fellow travellers. There were the usual faces; one gets to know omnibus occupants by heart. First, the fat lady, whom you never—fortunately—meet anywhere else; for she breathes shortly, occupies the place of two, and as she gets in and out extends a short fin-like arm towards the hand-rail, and cuts you mercilessly in the face with the heavily jetted border of her mantle. She never apologises—by this mark you may know her.

Then there was the deprecating little gentleman, invariably placed by fate beside the fat lady, who thoroughly obscures his view, whose voluminous draperies suffocate him, who scarcely dares to occupy any place at all, yet is always expected by both hand neighbours to occupy still less.

There was, of course, the hungry-looking girl with the fiddle case. Violin fever has broken out strongly among feminine London these last few years; every girl nowadays shows her individualism (?) by carrying a fiddle-case. But is it possible that musical talent is thus developing in leaps and bounds? I am tempted to believe, not all those cases contain their legitimate inmates; were locks to be forced,

some seventy-five per cent. would be found in use as æsthetic market-baskets, revealing butter, cheese, and ribbon ends instead of the imitation Amati or the spurious Strad.

There was also close beside me my familiar old acquaintance, the Major, who suffers no encroachment on his hired territory; he sits with knees wide apart, elbows squared, and hands resting on stick-top; he scowls defiance from under bushy brows, and refuses, by a mulish stolidity, to help in the transfer of coppers or change.

Finally there was the elderly female of heavy build burdened with the inevitable newspaper parcel; who always precipitates herself head foremost into the vehicle, lays a fat, moist hand on any part of your person that comes first, and seldom achieves a seat without crushing some innocent foot to a jelly. It was the Major's foot she had crushed this time, and if that member was "innocent," certainly his language was not. The "shameful words" that issued from his mouth would have made the dear old *Thunderer* sick with horror.

All these good people were, as I said above, types familiar to me, and the dull, oppressive atmosphere engendered by their damp raiment and intermingling breath would have assuredly sent me napping, but that my eyes fell lastly on the occupant of the corner seat opposite: a girl, and an attractive one.

There are some faces that please by what they show us, others by what they promise. Hers belonged to the latter class, the charm of which, I need hardly observe, is infinitely the greater. This girl had pretty eyes, a nice little nose and mouth, clear complexion, abundant hair. Many girls have as much. She also displayed, when she turned her head, an exquisite cheek-line. This is extremely rare. But her unique fascination lay deeper than this. It was comprised in the latent potentialities of her smile. I saw that she had the gift of giving such a smile as would change the blackest world to a heaven of light.

Don't scoff! I am a connoisseur in smiles. I have collected them, compared them, tabulated them for years, and a decade's assiduity has not enriched my cabinet with half-a-dozen perfect specimens. Grins, smirks, vapid simperings, I have in plenty; they stand bottled in spirits of wine on the monstrosity shelf; but of the true smile with its heavenly blending of lines, melting of colours, its warmth, radiance, sincerity, I have just four or five examples, and no more.

And here, suddenly, when thinking least about it, here in an omnibus, was made known to me the presence of the Koh-i-noor of smiles, hidden only by the thinnest of veils. I don't refer to the transparent material of criss-cross lines with the two black velvet spots drawn across the maiden's face, but to the thin veil of decorum that held that lovely smile at bay. I could see it would be lovely. I can read mouths in repose. I have smiled experimentally at so many, and I am forced to confess with the worst possible results.

For we are not a smiling nation; smiles don't come naturally to us. If you doubt me, experiment for yourself on the next dozen children you meet in the street. Eight will return the amenity with every species of infantile scowl, three will burst into tears and clamour for their nurses; you are lucky if *one* proves timidly responsive. While as for older people, these so persistently misread their Shakespeare to the effect "a man who smiles and smiles *must* be a villain," that they meet any such friendly overture with the most frozen contempt.

But leaning back in my corner and gazing dreamily at the possessor of the latent smile, I felt sure that such entrancing lines of mouth and chin could never express aught but suavity. What an upward curve at the corners! made for smiling; what a dear depression in the under lip! I closed my eyes; I recalled the recent utterance of one of our writers, who teaches us art, manners and morality in the monthly magazines, on the perils of addressing a girl in an omnibus; I asked myself would this apply equally to smiling? Then I opened my eyes again, encountered those of my vis-a-vis, and, after an instant's pause—she smiled.

How did it come about that three minutes later we were talking like old friends? It was the smile that did it. For it revealed to me not only two soul-subduing dimples, curves of an even unanticipated beauty, and teeth white and sound as the heart of a hazel-nut split in two (Emerson has taught me to trust a woman who shows, in smiling, white and even teeth); but it told me also of wit and cordiality, sweetness and sense, and all the thousand gifts that nature gives to her best-loved daughters.

The smile informed me that here was the not impossible She whom I had sought so long and so eagerly in suburban drawing-rooms and at subscription dances in country towns and bar-parlours, and fashionable assembly-rooms, yea! even in the columns of the matrimonial papers—and let me add, hitherto in vain.

I said all this to the smile, and more, and she confided to me many bewilderingly delightful things in return. I swore adherence to the Platonic theory that every human being is but the divided half of some single soul, and thus can never attain completeness until he meets his other self. I had met mine now, and I told this to the smile too.

The elderly female took umbrage. She raised herself up by a steadying grip on my knee, and tottered off to the virtuous vicinity of the conductor and the oil-lamp.

The maiden and I were alone at our end of the omnibus, and in darkness but for the illuminating smile, which guided me safely through the most difficult conversational mazes, and shed its glory on my feeblest quirks and epigrams. It did more; it penetrated to the recesses of my soul, and lighted up all those fine thoughts and feelings I inwardly delight in, but never can render into adequate speech.

The smile and I were now passionately in love with each other, and over our journey was shed the glory and the glamour of a dream.

Like a dream, too, was the ever-increasing discomfort of the omnibus.

It was jolting more and more, as it does when emptying of its human ballast. It suddenly stopped with a jerk that pitched me half off the seat.

"Are you goin' to stay there all night?" said a voice. I opened my eyes. The vehicle was empty. The lamp over the doorway shone only on the worn and flattened velvet seats, on the conductor's spleenful face.

"Put me down at the Mansion House," I said urbanely.

"You passed it an hour ago," retorted he.

"Where are we now then?"

"This 'ere is the Mile End Road, an' that there is the Angel Arms, an' if you didn't fall asleep when you didn't houghter, you wouldn't need to be askin' no question like a two-year-old child."

Evidently a pirate omnibus. No servant of the Company's would have demeaned himself to such language.

But had I really been asleep? Where was the smile? Where the maiden? Did she ever really smile at all? Or had I fallen a prey to my dominant idea, and dozed off while studying the lines of her delightful mouth?

Anyhow, I had missed my city dinner. Yet what matter? "Are forty wagging beards worth one girl's smile?"

No, a thousand times no; and even though you tell me it was purely fancy-bred, it had given me, for all that, a delight "more deep and delicate" than many a solid half-quartern loaf of grim reality.

GILBERT H. PAGE.

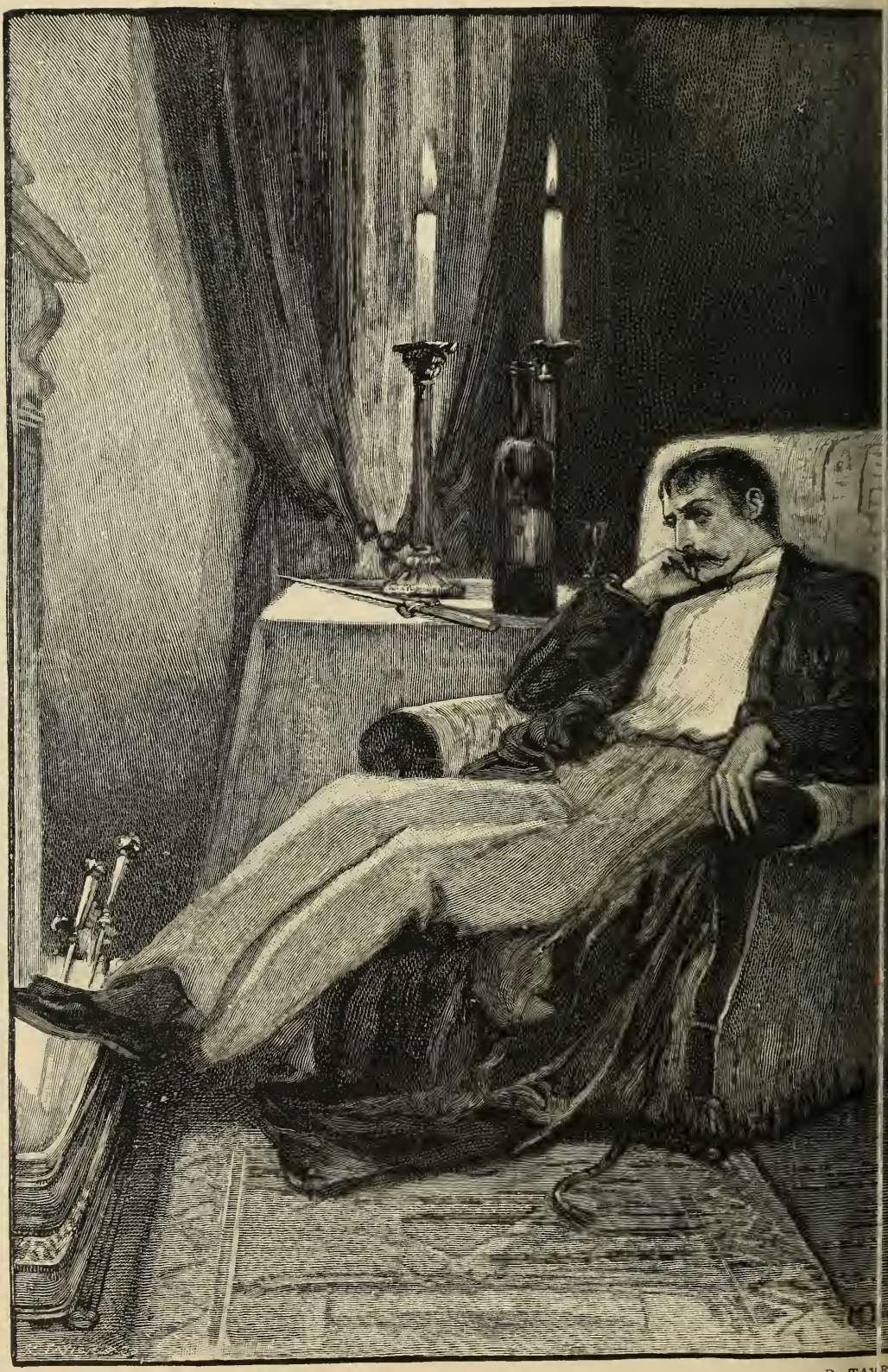
## LIFE'S SEASONS.

SWEETHEART, sweetheart, summer is coming,
What will it bring to you and to me?
Dreams more tender than morning's blush,
Gayer songs than the speckled thrush
Trills to his mate from the cherry tree
With heart as light as a feather.
A sea of sapphire, a heaven of blue,
A life like a fairy tale come true,
A wonderful world wherein we two
Shall wander away together.

Sweetheart, sweetheart, autumn is coming,
What will it bring to you and to me?
Golden corn from the seedling sprung,
Fruit that hangs where the blossom hung,
Luscious spoil of the honey bee,
So hard at work o'er the heather.
And better than wealth of the fertile weald,
The treasure that faithful love shall yield
When we in the world's wide harvest field
Are binding our sheaves together.

Sweetheart, sweetheart, winter is coming,
What will it bring to you and to me?
Twilight grey for the glow of youth,
Stern decay with his scorn of ruth,
While nature sleeps, from her labour free,
And life has scantier tether.
But if I yet in your eyes may look,
What matter the sunny paths we took?
Nay, pleasanter now the ingle nook,
And rest that is ours together.

SYDNEY GREY.



M L GOW.

R. TAYR.

*HAUNTED*

THE ARGOSY.

*NOVEMBER, 1891.*

# THE FATE OF THE HARA DIAMOND.

## CHAPTER XL.

### CHASING "LA BELLE ROSE."

IT was broad day when Captain Ducie awoke. Even before his eyes were open, or he was conscious of where he was, there was upon him the overwhelming sense of some great calamity.

His gaze wandered round the familiar room, and as it did so, he asked himself what it was that had befallen him.

Before he had time to consider the question, or even to answer it, a great shock went through his heart, and with a loud cry he sprang from his bed on to the floor.

"The Diamond!"

He felt for it. It was gone. Even before his fingers had time to touch the seal-skin pouch his instinct told him that it was not there. He turned as white as a man at the point of death, and sank into a chair with a deep groan. His chin dropped on his breast, and two great tears rolled slowly from his eyes and fell to the ground.

A disarrangement of the carpet attracted his eye. It had been turned back for the space of a yard or so, leaving the boards bare. On this bare patch was a tiny cone of white ash.

Ducie's suspicions were aroused in a moment. He stooped and took up a pinch of the ash and smelt it. It emitted a faint odour, similar to that more powerful odour which had overcome him so strangely in the course of the night.

No recollection of his dream, or of that still more singular vision in which Cleon had acted so prominent a part, had touched his memory since waking. But now, by one of those peculiar mental processes with which all of us are familiar, although we may not be able to explain them, the faint perfume that still pervaded the ash he had taken up between his fingers brought vividly back to his recollection every scene, real and imaginary, in which he had acted a part during his sleeping hours.

The five of clubs and his game of cards with the Memphian statue —he remembered that, and he at once put it aside as nothing more than a dream of a somewhat bizarre character. After that, the strange odour that filled his room, precisely similar to that of the ash in his hand; the sudden apparition of Cleon; the dagger, and the rape of the Diamond: were those things dreams or realities? Dreams, nothing but idle dreams, he should have replied at any other time, but with the sense of his irreparable loss eating into his very soul, he could only acknowledge that for him they made up a bitter reality.

Cleon had been there in person, and had succeeded in stealing the Diamond.

With a terrible string of imprecations on the mulatto's head, Ducie flung open the casement and let in the sweet morning air. There were two more tiny cones of white ash, similar to the first, on other parts of the floor.

"That fiend of a mulatto has obtained access to my room," muttered Ducie to himself. "The powerful odour which had such a strange effect upon me must have been emitted by the pastilles, the ashes of which are before me. The pastilles were doubtless compounded of some strong narcotics, probably of certain Oriental drugs with the qualities of which Cleon was acquainted. I have been the victim of an infernal plot."

That Cleon had been there could not be doubted; but where was he now? Ducie halted in his troubled walk as this question put itself to him, and turned to examine the door. It was unbolted, but otherwise shut. His custom was to bolt it every night before getting into bed; but did he really bolt it last night? He could not recollect. Considering the state in which he was when he came to bed, was not the probability in favour of his having left it unfastened? In any case, that was now a point of little consequence. The Diamond was gone, and Cleon was doubtless gone with it. The mulatto was not such a fool as to remain in the neighbourhood of a man whom he had mortally offended, especially when his interests imperatively demanded that he should get safely away. Between him and Ducie the case was now one of life and death.

A fresh thought struck him, and he turned to look at his watch. It was a quarter past six. The Southampton boat did not sail till a quarter to seven. Was it not most probable that Cleon, calculating on his, Ducie's, not awaking till after that time, would attempt to leave the island by the early boat? It was most probable that he would do so. "But if he leaves Jersey, I leave it with him," murmured the Captain. "I shall certainly kill him the first opportunity I have of doing so."

Captain Ducie's window commanded a view of that end of the pier from which the steamer started. He could see a knot of passengers and their luggage already assembled. It was hardly likely that the

mulatto would be one of them, still Ducie thought that he might as well satisfy himself on that point. On his dressing-table was a very powerful field-glass. Ducie took it up and directed it full on the clump of people at the end of the pier. His eye ranged over the component parts one by one, but no Cleon was to be seen. He was hardly disappointed, because he had not expected to find the mulatto there. Before putting down the glass, with an instinct that to him was like second nature, he swept the horizon of sky and sea with it. Elizabeth Castle and the whole expanse of St. Aubin's Bay were visible to him. The morning was clear—deceitfully clear—and Ducie's experienced eye told him that a change of weather was at hand. Coming back from the horizon his eye took in the features nearer home. One or two pair-oar boats were paddling lazily about just outside the harbour. Beyond them were three or four sailing boats with their white wings outspread to catch the light and fickle breeze which seemed this morning as if it could not make up its mind to blow steadily from one point for more than five minutes at a time. The outermost of the sailing boats was tacking out of the harbour with every inch of its tiny sails spread to catch the wind. In this boat were three men, two of them sailors, the third evidently a passenger, probably some visitor to the island going out on a fishing excursion. Such would have been Ducie's natural conclusion had he cared to think about the matter at all. The boat came for a moment within the range of his glass, and in that moment one of the three men turned his head as if to see what progress had been made from land. Ducie gave a start and a cry. The man who had looked back was none other than the mulatto.

One more steady look at the boat and its occupants and then Captain Ducie went on dressing with all speed. He understood the case in a moment. Cleon would not venture to leave the island by the steamer, fearing, probably, that she might be boarded by Ducie before leaving. His plan had been to hire a smack to take him either to the French coast or to Guernsey; and had it not happened to be dead low water about the time he ought to have got away, and the boats to be all lying high and dry in the harbour: two facts which had probably never entered into his calculations: he would have been a dozen miles from St. Helier by this time, and might have set pursuit at defiance.

In five minutes Captain Ducie was ready to start. His field-glass was slung over his shoulder. In one pocket of his gray shooting-jacket he carried a Colt's revolver, and in the other a flask containing brandy, and a few biscuits.

"Unless I am greatly mistaken," muttered Ducie to himself as he made his way with rapid strides towards the basin, "my friend Martin's little *Demoiselle* will outsail yonder clumsy craft on a light wind, in which case Mr. Cleon and I will have an earlier reckoning than he dreams of."

Captain Ducie was fortunate enough to find his friend Martin smoking an early pipe by the edge of the basin, and watching his tiny craft with a loving eye as she curtsied lightly to the incoming tide. Martin was a handsome, stalwart young fellow, whose ancestors for five hundred years back had followed the same occupation in the same place. Ducie had employed him several times on fishing excursions, and the two were sufficiently well known to each other. His boat, *La Demoiselle*, was famed, in the hands of her master, as being one of the fleetest little craft on the island.

A few words sufficed to let Martin understand what was required of him, and three minutes later the *Demoiselle* with outspread wings was skimming saucily over the crests of the tide in pursuit of the other boat, which Martin pronounced to be the *Belle Rose*. Martin's assistant had been left behind in order that the *Demoiselle* might sail as lightly as possible, Ducie himself engaging to assist in working the little craft.

*La Belle Rose* had a clear half-hour's start, and was working out nearly due south, that being her best tack for sailing as the wind then was. "She'll take a turn sou'east before another ten minutes is over," said Martin. "You see, sir, if she don't; and then she'll make straight for the Normandy coast."

"Martin," said Captain Ducie impressively, "on board yonder boat is a man who has robbed me of that which was of more importance to me than all else in the world."

"Master!" exclaimed Martin, in surprise.

"What I say is true. Now, listen. I want my revenge—as you would want yours were you in my place—eh?"

Martin nodded his head gravely, and drew a knife in pantomine.

"Consequently," resumed Ducie, "I want you to catch *La Belle Rose*. She has got a long start. Can you come up with her?"

"Master, I will try. The *Demoiselle* has never failed me yet when I've put her to the proof, and I don't think she will fail me to-day. We must steer more easterly, and not as if we were following the other boat; and then when she tacks, as she must do soon, we shall have gained a full half mile on her."

Ducie was steering, and he saw that by following the sailor's advice, the *Demoiselle* would cut off a large slice of the angle which must necessarily be made by the *Belle Rose* before she could touch the nearest part of the French coast. Besides which, such a course would divert suspicion from their real intentions, and in a stern chase that goes for something.

Ducie lighted a cigar, and passed his flask forward to the young sailor. "We shall have rain and more wind, sir, before the day is three hours older," said the latter.

"So much the better," answered Ducie quietly. "A gloomy deed should have a gloomy day. Martin, either the man in yonder boat or I will never see another sunrise. Perhaps neither of us may."

The young sailor gave his companion a look that was not unmixed with admiration. There was something that touched his wild notions of justice in the idea of a man being his own avenger.

Captain Ducie really meant what he said. He was thoroughly impressed with the belief that either for himself or Cleon that would be the last of earthly days. There was an element of gloom at the bottom of his nature—a dark abyss that had never been thoroughly sounded till a few hours ago. But the loss of his Diamond, preceeded as it was by the unaccountable desertion of Mirpah Van Loal—Love and Fortune both gone in a few short hours—had served to raise a demon in his soul of which he had heretofore been thoroughly master. Now it mastered him, and he gave himself up to it without a struggle. But the grand calm of a thoroughbred Englishman did not desert him even now. The young sailor discerned no change in him from the Captain Ducie who had gone out fishing but four days before, save, perhaps, that his eyebrows seemed to come down a shade lower, and that the eyes themselves were a shade darker, and that his voice was somewhat graver than common. Otherwise there was no outward sign to tell of the change within, and yet Jean Martin had an instinctive sense that he had a desperate man aboard his tiny craft—one determined to carry out his own will to the end, however terrible that end might be.

Captain Ducie sat in the stern and steered the *Demoiselle*, taking the word occasionally from Jean Martin. His glass was beside him. and now and then he took a peep at the chase. The different tacks on which the two boats were steering would have seemed, in a landsman's eye, to be hopelessly widening the distance between them, but when the *Belle Rose* suddenly yawed round and began to steer nearly due east of her previous course, Ducie saw the wisdom of Martin's advice. The two boats had, so to speak, been sailing down the opposite sides of a triangle. The *Belle Rose* had completed her side, and having turned the corner, was now sailing along the line of the base. But before she could reach the opposite end of the base, she would be intercepted by the *Demoiselle*.

Up to this time the progress of the *Demoiselle* seemed to have been unheeded by the people in the *Belle Rose*. But as soon as it became evident to those in the latter that the two boats were rapidly nearing, and must in a few minutes cross each other's line within speaking distance, a slight commotion was visible on board the *Belle Rose*.

Suddenly Martin, who had Ducie's glass to his eye, cried out:

"They are getting suspicious of us. They are taking stock of us through their glasses—and—no—yes, by the nightcap of St. Jacques! there's a black man on board the *Belle Rose!*"

"He is the man of whom I am in pursuit," said Ducie, from the stern. Then he added: "Keep your eye on them, Martin. Watch every movement, and tell me all you see."

"They have not seen your face yet, master, and they seem easier in their minds. But the black man keeps his glass to his eye. Ah, thief! scélérat! Jean Martin would like to have his fingers round your throat! Do you wish me to run close up to the *Belle Rose*, master? In five minutes you may, if you like, have yon black hound in your grip."

"Come you to the tiller now, Martin, and steer to within twenty yards of the *Belle Rose*, but no nearer unless I tell you."

So the two men changed places, and Ducie went forward with the glass in his hand. Cleon on his side was watching every movement on board the *Demoiselle*. Up to the present time the person of Captain Ducie had been in great part hidden by the sail, but now that he came forward he was plainly visible. The moment Cleon's glass showed him that stern, pale face, he fell back on his seat with an exclamation of terror, and seemed for a moment or two as one utterly paralysed. But the mulatto was by no means deficient in a sort of dogged animal courage, and the extremity of his peril left him no time for anything but immediate action. The two boats were now within fifty yards of each other, the *Demoiselle* bearing down like an arrow on the track of the *Belle Rose*. The mulatto took one more peep through his glass at Ducie. In the hand of the latter was an ugly-looking revolver.

Cleon could not doubt for what purpose it was intended, and he was too well acquainted with Ducie's undoubted skill with the weapon, having seen him practice with it several times at Bon Repos, not to know that his chance of life would hang on the merest thread if Ducie were once to pull the trigger. One look at the revolver was sufficient. Cleon spoke to the man at the tiller. The course of the boat was at once altered. The sail lost its wind, flapped for a moment or two against the mast like the broken wing of a bird, then caught the breeze on the opposite tack, and the *Belle Rose* coming sharply round through the hissing water turned her nose nearly due west and began to retrace the way she had come. Captain Ducie smiled grimly.

"If the cur thinks to escape me by going back to St. Helier and claiming the protection of the law, he will find himself mistaken. I will shoot him through the heart the moment his foot touches the pier."

Straight as a hawk after its quarry the *Demoiselle* at once followed up in the wake of the other boat. The *Demoiselle* had still some canvas to spare, and had she spread it, could easily have come up with the *Belle Rose*. But it was not Ducie's aim to do so.

Somewhat to Ducie's surprise, the *Belle Rose*, instead of turning northward and so making for the harbour of St. Helier, kept on her westerly course, and shot clean past the entrance, and so kept on till Elizabeth Castle was passed on the right, and both the boats found themselves skirting the outer edge of St. Aubin's Bay, and Noirmont

Point could be seen stretching out a rocky hand as if to bar their way. Ducie was puzzled, but said nothing. Could it be the mulatto's intention to skirt the western side of the island and make for Guernsey? But he would be no better off there than at Jersey. He, Ducie, would follow him to the very gates of perdition.

Martin's prediction had been verified. By this time the morning had clouded over, the wind was freshening, and a light, drizzling rain had begun to fall. It would be no pleasant voyage, truly, on such a day to cross the thirty miles of broken water between the two islands, and in so frail a craft. But what the *Belle Rose* dared do, that also dared the *Demoiselle.*

Noirmont Point was quickly passed, and soon St. Brelade's romantic Bay opened into view. Martin still steered, and Ducie still crouched like a wary sentinel in the fore part of the boat. The mulatto was no longer to be seen. He had probably stretched himself out at the bottom of the boat, dreading lest Ducie might take it into his head to fire. Why Ducie had not already fired was probably a source of surprise to him.

La Moye Point, which shuts in St. Brelade's Bay on the west, was neared and passed, and there, no great distance away, were the dread Corbière rocks wading out into the sea to entrap unwary mariners, smitten by the great waves and shrouding themselves in clouds of snowy spray. And now the head of the *Belle Rose* was turned northward, as if she were about to make for the shore. Ducie saw that the mulatto was about to take one of two courses: either to run full on the beach and so try to lose his pursuer among the rocks and caves which abound on that part of the island; or else to run his boat through some of the narrow and dangerous passages between the Corbières, on the chance of the *Demoiselle* not venturing to follow, and so gain sufficient headway by means of the short cut to render further pursuit hopeless. Ducie smiled to himself to think how futile the mulatto's efforts would be in either case.

It soon appeared that the hunted man had decided to take to the land as affording the best chance of escape. Close by was a small sandy nook that was sheltered between two protruding spurs of rock from the full swing of the tide. Into this tiny cove the *Belle Rose* shot with furled sail, and before her keel had fairly touched the sand, the mulatto was out of the boat and scrambling up the shelving beach with the agility of a tiger-cat. He just passed out of sight behind a broken fragment of rock as the *Demoiselle* shot round the spur and followed the *Belle Rose* into the little bay. Ducie pressed two sovereigns into the palm of Jean Martin and then leaped ashore. Cleon's footprints were plainly visible in the soft sand, and he followed them up with the instinct of a bloodhound.

## CHAPTER XLI.

### THE CAVE OF ST. LAZARE.

CAPTAIN DUCIE had one immense advantage over the man of whom he was in pursuit: he knew the Island thoroughly, having lived on it for several years when a boy at school. With that portion of it especially which stretches from St. Breladé on the south to Grève-de-Lecq on the north, he was intimately acquainted. Without much exaggeration it might be said that he knew every yard of the ground. Accordingly, when he had tracked the footprints of the mulatto to a point where the sandy beach ended and the shelving rock began, he troubled himself no further about them, but climbing straight up the face of the cliff with an agility that few men of his years could have imitated, he neither halted nor looked back till he had reached a small overhanging bluff that commanded the entire range of the precipice up which he had just clambered. This range of rock was only about a hundred yards in extent, and was shut in at the opposite end by another bluff which stretched out so far that its foot was already covered by the advancing tide.

From the smaller bluff, which Ducie had chosen as his eyrie, he could see every living thing larger than a rat that might move either along the sands or attempt to climb the rock. At the foot of this rock where it touched the sands there were several fissures large enough for two or three men to hide in. In addition to these there was a still larger opening, known as the Cave of St. Lazare. Now, it was quite evident to Ducie that the mulatto must be in hiding either in one of the minor fissures or in the cave itself, so that all he had to do was to wait patiently till Cleon should choose to quit his lair.

It is true that he might have gone down to the sands and have sought an encounter with the mulatto at close quarters. But he had an ugly recollection of Cleon's skill with the knife; beside which he had something of that feeling which induces a cat to play with a mouse before finally putting it out of its misery. So he crept forward on his hands and knees over the wet grass to the edge of the bluff, and there ensconced himself behind a thick clump of brushwood whence he could see, without being seen, everything that might transpire on the sands.

His first care was to satisfy himself as to the condition of his revolver. When he had made his mind easy on that score, he took a pull at his brandy flask and munched a biscuit, but still keeping a wary watch for the faintest movement below.

The *Demoiselle* and the *Belle Rose* had disappeared already, those in charge of them being intent on getting back to St. Helier as quickly as possible, for the weather was threatening. A drizzling rain was still falling, and Ducie was by no means sorry that such was the case: no prying tourists would think of visiting the cave on such a day.

The grim Corbière rocks were lashing themselves with whips of spray, like monks doing penance, and a heavy tide was rolling rapidly in. The strip of sand at the foot of the rocks was growing narrower from minute to minute, and soon the whole of it would be hidden.

"He must come out of his den before long, if he does not wish to be drowned like a rat in its hole," muttered Ducie to himself, as he marked the creaming billows frothing up almost to the foot of the rock. "I shall not have long to wait."

In fact, only two courses were left open to the mulatto: either to show himself and climb the rock under cover of Ducie's revolver, or else to remain in hiding till the tide swept up and drowned him. From Ducie's post of vantage the narrow entrance to the cave—so narrow, that only one person could enter at a time—was clearly visible.

The advancing tide had completely swallowed up the strip of sand and was licking the foot of the precipice before the slightest sign of human life was discernible below. Ducie, crouching behind the bushes, with his hand on his revolver, and every nerve in his body on the alert, watched and waited in silence. The first thing that he saw was a yellow claw protruded from the interior of the cave. This claw grasped the edge of the rock, and next moment a yellow face was pushed out, the two terror-stricken, bloodshot eyes of which roved frantically around as in search of some unseen foe. But there was nothing to be seen save the inrushing tide, the barren rock above and around, and a clump of brushwood on the cliff bending before the wind. Apparently re-assured, he crept wholly out of hiding, and after another cautious look round, he turned his face to the cliff and began to climb. But he had not made more than two steps upward when the sudden ping of a pistol smote his ear, and the same instant a bullet struck the rock about two feet above his head, breaking off some fragments which rattled down into the sea. The mulatto gave utterance to a wild yell of terror, and loosing his foothold, he slipped back into the water, which now reached up to his knees. Another moment and he had disappeared within the cave. Better run the risk of being drowned than again put himself in the way of that terrible revolver. It is doubtful whether he was aware that every high tide completely filled up the cavern. He may have thought that by climbing on to some of the higher ledges inside he would be safe till the subsidence of the water, by which time his enemy might probably be tired of waiting for him, or salvation might come in the shape of help from others. In any case, to venture outside the cave was certain death; to stop inside may have seemed to afford some chance of ultimate escape. But Ducie was well aware that to stop inside was certain death. When firing his revolver, his intention had been to frighten Cleon back into hiding, not to wound or kill him. It would be so much pleasanter if Cleon would allow himself to be quietly

drowned in the cave, instead of compelling him, Ducie, to put a bullet through his head. There might be people foolish enough to construe such a transaction as the one last named into wilful murder. The former could be put down as nothing more than an ugly accident.

So Ducie watched and waited, fully determined that by one mode or the other Cleon should that day come by his death. The tide rose higher and higher, but no yellow horror-stricken face was seen again outside the entrance to the cave. Then Ducie knew what would happen within. By-and-by the green lips of the waves kissed the roof of the doorway. Then Ducie knew that all was over, and that he had only to wait for the subsidence of the tide. He finished the brandy in his flask, and lighted a cigar, and waited.

It was considerably past mid-day before the water was low enough for him to venture into the cave. When he did venture in, the water came up to his waist. He waded slowly in, grasping the slippery rock carefully at each step that he took. He knew what he should find inside, and for the first time a feeling of awe crept over him. At length he stood in the middle of the cave and ventured to look round. A dim green light pervaded the place, too faint to discern anything that might be there. Ducie was not unprepared for such an emergency. He had brought with him a small box of the wax matches he sometimes used for lighting his cigar. He struck one of these on the bottom of the box and held it aloft. It burned for a minute, and that minute served to show him a black, shapeless heap of humanity lodged high up on one of the ledges of rock. To that spot the mulatto had climbed in the vain hope of escaping the ever-rising tide.

There was another ledge close to the one on which the body lay. On to this ledge Ducie climbed, and by kneeling on one knee and leaning over he could touch the dead man. He wanted to ascertain whether he had the Hara Diamond hidden anywhere about his person.

"What if he has swallowed it? What if he has thrown it into the sea?" Ducie asked himself. Then his hand touched the dead man's cheek, and he shuddered from head to foot.

He paused for a moment or two, and with an intense effort steadied his nerves to go through the task he had set himself to do. It was gone through carefully and thoroughly, but the Diamond was nowhere to be found. At length Ducie paused in sheer despair.

"He has evidently made away with the Diamond when he found that he could not escape, and so has carried his revenge beyond the grave," muttered Ducie.

Suddenly a thought struck him. Once more he bent over the dead man, and with both hands wrenched open his mouth. Another instant, and he had found the Diamond hidden away under the tongue that would never speak more.

Strong man though he was, the revulsion of feeling was almost more than he could bear. Tears of joy came into his eyes. He needed a minute or two to recover himself. As soon as his heart began to beat more calmly, he wrapped the Diamond in his handkerchief and stuffed the whole into an inner pocket of his waistcoat. Then he leaped down on to the sandy floor of the cave, and leaving the dead man on his rocky bed, he waded out by the way he had come; and having breasted the hill, he set out at a sharp pace across the moorland on his way to St. Helier. His clothes had been soaked through and through in the course of the day, but just now he was not in a frame of mind to give any thought to such a trifle.

## CHAPTER XLII.

### THE VERDICT OF MR. VERMUSEN.

Captain Ducie had a long, wet walk back to his hotel, and by the time he reached it he felt thoroughly exhausted. He had a bath and dined, and spent a quiet evening in the smoking-room, with no company save that of his own thoughts.

There was a deep underglow of satisfaction in his heart at recovering the Diamond, but there was one pressing question that required his immediate decision.

The body of the mulatto would in all probability be found on the morrow, or, at the latest, in the course of the following day. Although there could be little doubt that his death would be set down to pure accident, still an inquiry would be set on foot as to his name, position in life, etc., and the affair would be a nine days' wonder in the little island. The boatmen would naturally state that he, Captain Ducie, had been seen in the mulatto's company only a few hours before he came by his death; justice, in the persons of a coroner and twelve jurymen, would take cognizance of the affair; and he would be called upon to state the reason of his persistent pursuit of the mulatto, and what passed between them after landing at the Bay of St. Lazare. Such an inquiry would be distasteful to him in every way, and it seemed to him that the wisest thing he could do would be to start for England by the morning steamer. He would spend a couple of days in London, and then set out for Paris.

Once in the French capital, he must look out for some means of disposing of his Diamond. That was a negotiation which could not much longer be delayed.

His available funds were within a few sovereigns of being exhausted, and all his well-to-do friends had turned their backs on him long ago. But all his well-to-do friends might go hang. For the future he should be independent of them and their charity.

He would take up his permanent residence abroad: Continental

life was so much freer and more sociable than our cold-blooded, insular mode of wearing out existence.

He was still very sore on the subject of Mirpah Van Loal, and he would be so for some time to come. He winced mentally whenever her image crossed his mind. His self-love had been terribly wounded by her desertion of him; but beyond that there was an element of mystery about the sudden disappearance of herself and her father that puzzled him exceedingly.

Change of scene might be beneficial to him in more senses than one: he had better get away from the island as soon as possible.

He called for his bill and settled it, so that it might not delay his departure in the morning, after which his balance of ready money was reduced to a trifle. He must raise a few sovereigns on his watch when he got to London, otherwise he would hardly have sufficient to take him across the Channel.

As the clock struck ten, he took his bed-candle and went upstairs. He put back the Diamond in the place from which it had been taken by the mulatto—that is to say, in the seal-skin pouch that hung by a steel chain round his neck.

Before getting into bed he did not fail to subject his room to a careful examination, nor to satisfy himself as to the security of his door. He was terribly tired, and in five minutes after putting his head on the pillow he was soundly asleep.

He awoke all in a moment.

The night-lamp in his room, burning dim and low, just served to show that all was still dark outside. He awoke all in a moment, with the terribly vivid sensation of a cold wet hand laid heavily across his mouth. He started up in bed with a shudder that shook him from head to foot. He expected to see something near him—what, he could not have told.

The sight of the familiar features of his own room swept away his fright at once, but he could not quite so readily get over the sensation of sickness and disgust which affected him as deeply as if the hand had been a real one. His lips felt dry and parched, and he put out his tongue to wet them.

Again he shuddered. His lips tasted of salt water—tasted as if he had been drinking sea-water, and had allowed the salt to dry on them.

The hand that had been laid across his face was cold and wet, and smelled of the sea.

He leapt out of bed, feeling utterly upset. On looking at his watch he found that it was just four o'clock. There would be no daylight for another hour.

"Serve me right for eating that lobster," he said. "A man at my time of life has no business with suppers of any kind. If people will trifle with their digestive organs, they must expect to suffer for their folly."

He did not get into bed again, not caring to risk a repetition of that terrible sensation. Instead, he wrapped himself in a warm overcoat, selected a comfortable chair, lighted his meerschaum, and smoked away till day had fairly broken, and it was time to wash and dress in readiness for the steamer.

He was turning over some toilet appurtenances when his eye caught the corner of a letter protruding from under the looking-glass. He drew it out and found that it was addressed to himself, and that it bore the London post-mark. It had doubtless been laid on the table with the view of catching his eye, and then by some accident had got slipped under the glass. He opened it with some curiosity, saw that it was in a man's writing, and then glanced at the signature before beginning to read it.

The colour mounted into his cheek as he read the signature, "Solomon Van Loal," and with eager curiosity he turned back to the beginning.

The letter began without either date or address, and ran as under :—

"Sir,—The most cunning people are apt to deceive themselves at times, and few people are so easily gulled, when their suspicions are not aroused, as those who make a point of preying upon others. You, sir, in your own person, afford a conspicuous example of the truth of the above remarks.

"In extreme cases, where, for instance, a great wrong has to be righted, it sometimes becomes necessary to fight Fraud with its own weapons. If it is smitten, shall it cry out? If it is outwitted and compelled to disgorge its ill-gotten gains, shall it make a noise in the market-place? Let it rather fold its cloak decently about its head and go on its way in silence, thankful that its shoulders have escaped the whip of justice for a little while longer.

"I speak in no unmeaning parables, Captain Ducie. More underlies my words than may at first sight appear. If you do not understand my meaning when you read this, you will not long remain in ignorance of it.

"One word of warning in conclusion. Much of that which you believe to be locked up in your own bosom is known to me in all its details. There are certain episodes, having reference to your sojourn at Bon Repos, which you would hardly care to have made public. Take the advice of him who writes this letter and keep a discreet tongue in your head, otherwise you will make an implacable enemy of one who can work you more harm than you are aware of, and who now signs himself,

"Yours as you may prove to deserve it,

"Solomon Van Loal."

"What, in the fiend's name, does it all mean?" asked Captain Ducie, when he had read to the end of the letter. "Is the man

mad, or am I drunk?" His face was very white, but there was an ugly frown on it as he sat staring at the letter as if he could hardly believe it to be anything more than a foolish hoax. "By heaven! if I had the writer of it here I would twist his neck, old as he is!"

Then he read the letter carefully through again, weighing it sentence by sentence. When he had done, he put it back into its envelope and looked up with quite a frightened expression in his eyes.

"What does the old fool mean by 'fighting Fraud with its own weapons?' and by 'compelling me to disgorge my ill-gotten gains?' In what way has he 'gulled' me? He has taken nothing of mine, unless ——"

He was too sick at heart to finish the sentence, even to himself, but with a hand that trembled like that of an old man, he drew forth his seal-skin sachet, opened it, and took out of it the Hara Diamond. He took it out with the thumb and forefinger of his right hand and laid it on the palm of his left. There it rested, lustrous, glowing, unmatchable, absorbing the purest rays of the morning into itself, and then flinging them back intensified a thousandfold. The colour came back to Captain Ducie's cheek, his heart resumed its equable beating and nothing save an almost imperceptible trembling of the hand betrayed the crisis of feeling through which he had just passed.

"What a precious idiot I must be to allow myself to be frightened by the riddles of an old ass like Van Loal! The fellow must be crazy. No doubt he felt an attack coming on, and that was the reason why he left so abruptly. And so enough of him. Not even for the fair Mirpah's sake could I tolerate a lunatic father-in-law. Ah! my beauty," apostrophising the Diamond, "so long as I have you, or the worth of you, what care I how the world wags? You are my only true consolation—my only real friend! Come, *amigo mio*, let you and I, for the benefit and information of such persons as may tenant this chamber in time to come, write down Mr. Solomon Van Loal an ass. On the middle pane of the middle window, in prominent letters, we will write him down an ass."

The conceit pleased him, and he crossed the floor with the Diamond in his hands and a malicious smile on his lips to work out his poor morsel of revenge. He selected the spot with care, right in the centre of the middle pane. He gave a preliminary flourish with his hand and was about to make the first stroke, but paused. "I'll put my initials, E. D., under it," he said, and the malicious smile deepened as he spoke, "so that if the old rascal ever comes here again he may know to whom he is indebted for his brief immortality."

Then he gave his arm a second flourish, and essayed the first stroke.

With one of the facets of the Diamond he made the first curve of the letter S. But no mark followed.

Again he essayed to make the stroke, and again the glass remained as free from scratch or mark as if he had striven to write on it with

a common quill. A mist came over his eyes, and he sank, half-fainting, into the nearest chair.

"Ruined! irretrievably ruined!" he cried aloud in a voice of utter anguish. "That consummate villain has stolen the real Diamond, and has left me a worthless imitation in its place! Now —now I understand his letter. Now I understand why I was befooled by his daughter."

The worthless gem had dropped from his fingers and lay unheeded on the floor. He sat staring at it with lack-lustre eyes for a full half-hour. All his patience, his ingenuity, his underhand working—the death of Platzoff, the stealing of the Diamond, the murder of Cleon —had ended in this: that he had been outwitted by one more cunning than himself. And could he complain that he had been otherwise than rightly punished for what he had done? But he did not complain. Hope had died out utterly in his heart; and when that is the case with anyone, he is beyond vain repinings. The future? He dared not look at it. The dull, dead present was quite as much as his brain could dwell on just now.

He rose after a while and picked up the Diamond; and going to the window, he again essayed with one facet after another to make even the faintest scratch on the glass. But his latter efforts were as futile as his first had been. Then the thought struck him, and it was a thought that sent a brief glow of hope to his heart, that there might, perhaps, be something peculiar in the cutting of the Diamond which precluded it from marking the window; that its angles might be too much rounded, or something of that sort. The only way by which he could satisfy himself whether he had been duped or no—whether the Diamond was a real or an imitation one—was to take it to someone thoroughly conversant with such things, and obtain his verdict thereon. Even while this thought was in his mind, it came into his memory that he had seen a quaint little shop, in a certain out-of-the-way street in St. Helier, with this legend painted over the window: *H. Vermusen, Lapidary and Dealer in Precious Stones.* He remembered it from thinking at the time he might, perchance, call some day on Mr. Vermusen, and show him the Diamond.

To this man he would at once go. These alternations of hope and fear were killing him. He would put off his departure from the island till to-morrow. Even if Cleon's body had been already found, it would take more than another day to so complete the chain of evidence as to bring home the fact that he, Ducie, had been in any way concerned in the mulatto's death. He was safe for another twenty-four hours.

He looked at his watch. Time had flown rapidly. It was now a quarter-past six. Would the lapidary's shop be open at that early hour? Hardly. He would finish dressing, and go out on to the sands, and there wait till the clock should strike eight.

As the church clock struck eight, Captain Ducie opened the door

of Mr. Vermusen's shop. Mr. Vermusen himself came out of a dark inner den to wait upon his early visitor. A spectacled, high-nosed old gentleman, in a black velvet skull-cap, and a faded velvet dressing-gown.

"In what can I have the pleasure of serving you, sir?" he asked with a slow rubbing of his lean hands and a sharp glance over his spectacles at Captain Ducie's pale, haughty face."

Ducie had thoroughly made up his mind during his solitary walk along the sands to bear whatever the diamond-merchant might have to tell him, whether it were good news or bad, without any outward tokens either of elation or dismay. When, therefore, he answered Mr. Vermusen's question his voice was even more low and equable than usual, but he could not altogether hide the anxiety that lurked in his eyes.

"You are a lapidary and dealer in precious stones, I believe?"

Mr. Vermusen bowed.

"I have here an object—a something—the value of which I wish to ascertain. It was found a few days ago by a sister of mine at the bottom of an old oak chest that had not been opened for quite forty years. The chest was full of old family papers—leases, title deeds, what not—none of which had been needed for a very long time. Having occasion, however, to look for some missing document, the chest was emptied, and, as already said, this article was found at the bottom. My sister has sent it to me with the view of ascertaining its value."

While speaking, the thumb and finger of his right-hand had been inserted in his waistcoat pocket. They now brought out the Hara Diamond (or its imitation) and dropped it gently into the skinny palm of the old lapidary. A low sigh which he could not repress told with what anxiety Captain Ducie awaited the verdict of Mr. Vermusen.

Grave and immovable as a judge, the diamond-dealer received the glittering gem in his palm. A moment he looked at it through his spectacles; then by a gentle up and down movement of his hand he seemed to be testing its weight as in comparison with its size. Then he fixed a small microscope in his eye and surveyed the facets carefully through it. Then he put it in his mouth and rolled his tongue round it three or four times. Lastly, he put it into a pair of tiny brass scales and weighed it. Then he looked up and spoke.

"Paste, sir—paste," was all he said.

There was a chair close by where Captain Ducie was standing. He sank into it, as it seemed without any volition on his part. For a few moments he did not speak. Then he said very quietly: "You are quite sure that it is nothing more than paste?"

The old lapidary's thick white eyebrows went up in quiet disdain. "I am not in the habit, sir, of making assertions which I cannot maintain by proof," he said drily. "With your permission, and by

the aid of this little file, I will prove to you in a still more effectual way that I have stated nothing more than a simple fact."

"Thanks. No. I ask your pardon for seeming to doubt your word. I am satisfied." He paused, and Mr. Vermusen looked as if he thought the interview ought to end there. But presently Captain Ducie spoke again.

"I presume that you are a dealer in all sorts of gems, both real and fictitious. Have you any objection to purchase this one of me at your own price?"

"Such a purchase would be of no use whatever to me. Your gem is too large for setting either as a genuine stone or an imitation one, and to break it up would be to render it still more worthless than it is now. I must decline to purchase it at any price."

Captain Ducie put the glittering impostor back into his pocket. Then he rose, lifted his hat, bade Mr. Vermusen a courteous good-morning, and so quitted the shop without another word.

When he got into the street he hesitated for a moment or two which way he should turn. But all ways were now alike to him. Instinctively he took the road leading to the sea.

As he reached the bottom of the street, a heavy, broad-wheeled waggon, laden with stone, was on the point of turning the corner. A sudden impulse came into his mind, and he acted on it without giving himself time for a second thought. He took the Diamond out of his pocket, stooped down, and placed it full in the track of the waggon wheel. With indrawn breath and tense muscles he stood watching the ponderous wheel roll slowly forward. One more turn, and the Diamond was hidden for ever. A faint crunching noise, a tiny heap of glittering dust, and all was over. With a sigh and a shrug of the shoulders, Captain Ducie went his way.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

### HAUNTED.

For full three hours Captain Ducie wandered by the lonely shore. A train of wild and incoherent thoughts, like torn fragments of cloud in a windy sky, chased each other brokenly across his mind. One thought alone—to which all the rest were subsidiary—found a permanent resting-place in his mind, shutting in the horizon of his life on every side as with a sombre pall. It was the thought—or rather, the knowledge—that he was irretrievably ruined.

In the common parlance of the world he had been "ruined" twice before. But on both those occasions he had had something to fall back upon: rich relations, powerful friends; a windfall, on one occasion, from a wealthy aunt who happened to die just at the time when her cash was most needed; and under all, at the bottom of the basket, had lain youth and hope. But now! Well: his relations

were hopelessly alienated; one by one his powerful friends had all turned their backs on him; his character, like an old piece of electro-plate, would have looked all the brighter for a little polishing: he was without money, without youth, without hope. Work he could not, and to beg he was ashamed. Such being the case, what was there left for him but to throw up the sponge, cry quits, and go under as soon as possible?

The clear, bright morning had settled down into a raw, drizzling day. Captain Ducie paced the sands for full three hours, heedless of the wet and cold. Then he went into the town and pawned his watch for ten sovereigns. Thence he wandered back to the hotel. He could not eat, but the power of drinking was still left him. He had a fire lighted in his bedroom and ordered up a bottle of cognac. He was ill, not only mentally but bodily. He was suffering from the reaction consequent on the excitement of the last few days. But it was more than any common reaction—it was the dull, dead apathy of one who sees himself hopelessly cut off from all that makes life worth the having. In addition to this, as the day went on, he began to suffer from the first symptoms of a sort of low fever brought on by the severe cold he had caught during his many hours' exposure on the cliffs while hunting down the mulatto. His head ached, his eyes throbbed, all his pulses seemed to be on fire. But to deaden the still more weary ache at his heart he kept on resorting, every now and again, to the bottle of cognac by his bedside. For he had gone to bed as soon as his fire was lighted, and there he lay all through the dreary afternoon and the still drearier evening, and till far into the night, tossing and turning from side to side, courting the sleep that would not come.

But it came to him at last. He had counted the weary chimes one after another till now midnight was here. In the act of counting the twelve strokes as they were doled out slowly one by one from some near-at-hand church, he sank off quietly to sleep, and for a little while both head and heart were at rest.

He had slept for some two hours or more when suddenly he started up in bed with precisely the same sensation that had awakened him the night before—the sensation of a cold, wet hand pressed heavily across his mouth and nostrils so as utterly to stop his breathing. As before, he woke up in the most extreme terror and with great drops of agony on his brow. Instinctively he put out his tongue and passed it across his lips. Again he fancied that he could detect upon them the taste of sea-water. For him, that night, there was no more sleep.

The fever still held him like a burning vice. He lay tossing and groaning in its hot embrace, looking ever with impatient eyes for the dawn that was so long in coming. It came at last, as all things come in their turn. Then Captain Ducie rose, washed and dressed. Despite his illness, he was thoroughly bent on quitting the island by

that morning's boat. He hungered to be back in England, in London, among the busy haunts of men. The terrible Hand which had broken his sleep for two nights in succession would hardly follow him into the heart of London. There he would lie by till he was better, mentally and bodily, and could afford to face the gloomy future with some degree of manly fortitude. He had known fellows as utterly bankrupt and ruined as he was, who had yet managed to survive their difficulties, seeming, indeed, to float none the less gaily along the stream of life, although they might not have a sovereign to call their own. He had relations, rich and many, who had one and all declared that if he were begging his bread they would turn him empty from their doors; but now that the grim reality was so near, when begging his bread would soon be his only portion unless help were granted him by someone, they would surely concert together, and, were it only for the sake of the family credit, would arrange amongst themselves a life pittance for him, on which, in some quiet Continental nook where there was good scenery and good society, he might vegetate not unpleasantly for the remainder of his days.

He went down to breakfast, but could not touch a morsel, although he had not tasted food since the day before yesterday. A close carriage took himself and his luggage to the steamer. The morning was cold, wet, and stormy, with a nasty cross sea. He was not displeased to find that very few passengers were going over. He wanted to be as much alone as possible. The fever that had parched him up all night had now been succeeded by a chill that made his teeth chatter, and caused him to tremble in every limb. He went below deck and lay down in a berth and got the steward to heap a lot of wraps about him, and to bring him some hot brandy, but for a long time he felt as if he should never be warm again. All his life he had been a good sailor, he never remembered having been sea-sick. But to-day the boat had hardly got clear of the harbour before he was attacked. By the time the steamer reached Guernsey he had little or no power of volition left in him. He beckoned to his friend the steward. "Let me be put ashore here," he whispered. "I will wait for fairer weather before going on."

So he was carried ashore by three or four stalwart sailors, and deposited in a fly, and driven off to the hotel "Pomme d'Or." He was exceedingly ill, and he went off to bed at once. The people at the hotel wanted to have a doctor called in, but he would not hear of such a thing. It was only that confounded *mal-de-mer*, he said, and he should be better in the morning.

But he was not better in the morning. If anything, rather worse.

Again he was woke up in the middle of the night by feeling a wet hand laid across his mouth. This persistent disturbance of his sleep, together with the very want of sleep itself, was beginning to tell upon his nerves. When was the terrible persecution to end?

The sensation was so horrible as utterly to banish sleep for the time being, and again he lay tossing to and fro, waiting with impatient eyes for the dawn. About eight he rose and made a show of eating some breakfast. After breakfast he sat in his easy-chair before the fire, and while thus sitting he felt a sweet drowsiness steal through all his limbs. It was broad daylight now, and with the darkness some portion of the fear inspired by the Hand had vanished. He could almost afford to smile at his fright of the last three nights. In any case, he let the drowsiness have its way, and so in three minutes more he was fast asleep before the fire.

But he had not been more than ten minutes asleep when he was disturbed in precisely the same way that he had been disturbed before. And, if his senses did not deceive him, he heard the echo of a low malignant laugh close at the back of his chair. He stared round half expecting to see he knew not what. But every nook and corner of the room was plainly visible. There was no one there but himself. He shuddered from head to foot, and sank back in his chair, and burst into tears.

To-day the weather was even stormier than yesterday: a higher wind, more rain. He was not hurried for time, and to cross either to Southampton or Weymouth in the condition in which he then was, would be sheer madness. He would have medical advice while thus laid up in ordinary at the "Pomme d'Or," and would get cured of his cold, and have an opium mixture to make him sleep, and would wait for fairer weather and a gentler sea before attempting to continue his voyage. If he could only recover the lost tone of his nerves, he felt thoroughly convinced that he should never more be haunted by that nightmare Hand.

Captain Ducie had always held the whole tribe of doctors in abhorrence. He had not been under the hands of one of the brotherhood for more than twenty years, and nothing could have been more strongly indicative of the state to which he was now reduced, than the fact of his determining of his own free will to call in medical advice. He was, in very truth, wretchedly ill, thoroughly woe-begone.

The doctor came, saw him, listened to what he had to say, and prescribed. Ducie entered into no details as to the mode in which his sleep was broken. He merely said that he was unable to get his proper rest in consequence of being so frequently troubled with nightmare, and he begged of the doctor to provide him with a powerful opiate. Medicine came: two bottles: one for the improvement of his cold, the second to be taken just before getting into bed.

Ducie spent a doleful day enough. He had no heart left to read either a newspaper or a magazine, and the very thought of a cigar turned him sick. This latter he regarded as a very bad sign. "When a fellow gets past his smoke, he's not of much account in this world," he said to himself, with a sigh. Still, he did not fail to

ierive some grains of comfort that with the assistance of his friend he doctor he should succeed in cheating that terrible nightmare vhich seemed bent on slowly pressing his life out an inch at a time.

He waited with desperate patience without any further attempt t sleep till he heard the people below stairs shutting up the hotel or the night. Then he got into bed, and marking off, with his fore-nger on the bottle, a dose and a half of the draught, he swallowed it iore gratefully than he had ever swallowed the choicest wine, and ien lay down.

Hardly, as it seemed to him, had his head touched the pillow efore a delicious languor stole through all his limbs, and with a half irn over to the other side, he was gone.

He was gone, and in a deeper sleep, probably, than he had ever een in before. But it was a sleep that did not last above an hour. t the end of that time it was broken precisely as it had been broken efore. Only, this time, as if on account of his being so soundly sleep and therefore more difficult to arouse, he seemed closer to the oint of actual suffocation than he had been before. He gasped for reath, and gurgled in his throat, and the veins of his forehead stood it thick and blue as though the circulation were on the point of eing violently stopped for ever. Again his returning senses seemed catch the sound of a low mocking laugh, and again there was the ste of salt water on his lips.

His terror this time on awaking was, if such a thing were possible, ore extreme than it had ever been before, inasmuch as he felt that had been closer to the verge of death. "Another half-minute, id I should have been gone past recovery," he said to himself as he ped the great drops of agony off his brow. "Devil!" he muttered oud—"yellow-skinned son of the bottomless pit, so this is your venge, is it?" There was a sort of stony despair in his set, lourless face, but a wild, almost insane defiance flashed from the llow caverns of his eyes. "You may win the day, perhaps: I nnot help that," he cried. "But the victory shall be in my fashion not in yours!"

From that moment he seemed to accept the fate which he saw oming before him as a foregone conclusion from which it was im-ssible to escape.

Unconsciously to himself, perhaps, he was somewhat of a fatalist his ideas: the maxim, that "What is to be, must be," was one it was often in his mind if seldom on his lips. He felt like one of ose doomed beings whose tragic woes the Greek dramatists loved sing; he was pursued by a shadowy Nemesis, from whose ntless grasp there was no escape. He could only bow his head silence and submit.

He got out of bed and made himself some chocolate, and sat oding over the fire for the remainder of the night.

Two or three times he fell off into a broken dose, which lasted for

only a few minutes each time, and each time his slumber was broken by the menace rather than the reality of the terrible Hand.

The access of terror through which he had passed early in the night had the effect of rendering him comparatively callous to these minor visitations. Still they all had their effect in helping to wear him out, both in body and mind.

After breakfast—which with him was a mere pretence of a meal—he ordered up pens, ink and paper, and sat down to write.

With a few intervals of rest, he kept on writing through the day, and did not finish till an hour after candles had been brought up. He put what he had written into two different envelopes, which he sealed up and addressed. Then he burned several old letters which lay at the bottom of his despatch box, and, lastly, he took a long, brown, silky ringlet, which he had not looked at for years, from its resting-place in a tiny satin-lined case, and after pressing it passionately two or three times to his lips, he dropped that, too, into the fire. After that he sat for a full hour gazing with sorrowful eyes into the smouldering embers, without stirring a limb.

The doctor had called about noon, whereupon Ducie had assured him that he had passed an excellent night, and felt himself very much better than on the previous day.

The medico looked rather dubious, but could not get over his patient's assurances that he was rapidly improving. Indeed, to-night, after he rose from his seat by the fire and began to pace his room, there was a brightness in his eyes, and an amount of energy in his manner, that might have deceived an inexperienced person into thinking that the morrow would find him perfectly recovered.

A little later on he took a bath and perfumed himself, and ordered up a choice supper, of which he partook with more appetite than he had shown for several days past. Then he began to prepare for bed.

But before retiring for the night, he dived deep into his portmanteau and fished up from its depths a long, thin Damascus dagger of blue steel, with an inlaid haft. He wiped it carefully and felt its point, smiling cynically the while, and then he laid it on the little table by his bedside.

He was soon asleep, but only to be awakened a couple of hours later, as he had been awakened before, by the pressure of a cold wet hand across his mouth and nostrils, and by feeling that he was on the verge of suffocation. It took him two or three minutes to recover his equanimity. Then he got out of bed, put on his dressing-gown, lighted the candles, and wheeled an easy-chair up to the fire.

The wind was roaring down the chimneys of the hotel and shaking the windows, and he could hear the heavy dashing of the sea against the granite walls of the pier.

A wild, eerie night—a night on which the spirits of the dead might easily be supposed to come forth and wander round the places they had loved best on earth.

Captain Ducie drew the little table close up to his easy-chair, and then sat down before the fire and rested his feet on the fender. On the table were a bottle of cognac, a wineglass, and the "bare bodkin" with the inlaid haft.

It may be recollected that after George Strickland obtained Captain Ducie's address from the porter at the Piebalds Club, he telegraphed to Major Strickland at Eastbury. The reply to his message was a request that he would proceed to Jersey without delay, and there, if possible, bring his search to a definite conclusion.

On reaching St. Helier, he went at once to the "Royal George," and inquired for Captain Ducie. In reply he was told that Captain Ducie had left by the Southampton boat four days previously. George was excessively chagrined, for he had quite made up his mind that he should find Ducie at St. Helier. All that he could now do was to go back to London and there wait till a fresh address should be sent by Ducie to the Piebalds, and then follow him up from that point. So he stayed that night at the "Royal George," and started for England by next morning's steamer.

He was standing on the bridge of the steamer, gazing on what looked like a bank of cloud in the distance, but which someone had told him was Guernsey, when the captain and one of the passengers came up and halted close by him. They were talking earnestly together, and George heard the name of Captain Ducie twice mentioned by the captain. He moved away out of earshot till the two men separated. Then he went up to the captain.

"I accidentally heard you mention the name of Captain Ducie," he said. "May I ask whether you are acquainted with that gentleman, and whether you can tell me his present address?"

"I am not acquainted with the gentleman in question," said the captain, "but I can tell you his present address. If you choose to inquire at the 'Pomme d'Or,' in St. Peter's, you will find him lying there, stark dead, stabbed to the heart by his own hand."

George was inexpressibly shocked. In answer to his question, the captain supplied him with these further particulars: Ducie had been stopping at the "Pomme d'Or" for the last two or three days, very much out of health. He had been seen by a doctor, who had pronounced him to be suffering from a species of low fever, brought on through having contracted a severe cold; his nerves, too, seemed to be very much shaken and out of order. There seemed nothing, however, but what a few days' rest, with due attention to the doctor's prescriptions, would have set right. Yesterday morning, on being called, there was no answer, and on the door being forced, Ducie was found dead, having evidently stabbed himself some time in the night with a small dagger that was found on the ground not far away.

George landed at Guernsey, and hurried up to the "Pomme d'Or," where every particular which the captain had given him was confirmed.

It was clearly proved that the act must have been premeditated, seeing that the uppermost thing in the dead man's writing-desk was a slip of paper, on which was written a request that in case of anything happening to himself his cousin, the Honourable Egerton Dacre, should at once be communicated with. This request had been complied with before George reached the hotel, so he made up his mind to await the arrival of Mr. Dacre, and detail to him the circumstances which had led to his taking such an interest in the fate of Captain Ducie.

The Hon. Mr. Dacre arrived in due course, and after the funeral was over, George introduced himself, and told his story.

"It is just the sort of thing Ned would be likely to do," said Mr. Dacre; "to contract a secret marriage," and afterwards to separate from his wife. I am, however, pleased to find that the lady to whom he gave his name came of so excellent a family. As regards his daugher, I know of no reason why she should not be received as such by all of us. I am sure my mother will be delighted to find that Ned has left a child whom she may acknowledge without a blush. Of course you are aware that Ducie has died as poor as a rat, so that in the way of worldly goods the young lady must not expect anything from our side of the house, unless she be in want of a home, in which case we will gladly welcome her. I must, however, lay the whole case before Ned's elder brother, with whom, as being the head of that branch of the family, the settlement of all future details must rest.

Such were the tidings that Captain George Strickland took back with him to Eastbury.

*(To be concluded).*

# THE TROUBADOURS.

By J. F. Rowbotham, Author of "A History of Music."

PROVENCE and Languedoc seem to invite to poetry and song. The serenity of the climate, the picturesque beauty of the landscapes, which were said "to sleep in superfluity of verdure," the silver lacing of thousands of tiny rivers, and above all the thick carpet of wild flowers which enamels everywhere the soil—these are features of loveliness that are extant even to-day. But yet more enchanting was the place in days of yore.

"In our land of Provence," says an old mediæval writer, "the birds sing so sweetly, the breezes make such melody, and the mere tinkling of the waterfalls is so harmonious that I wonder the very peasant boys do not break forth into singing at every step they take, from blithe companionship with the nature around them."

It was here that towards the close of the twelfth century the Troubadours were keeping their mimicry of chivalry; and, with a strange fidelity to all the rites and usages of feudal knighthood, contrived by a soft inversion to make music do the duty of arms.

The Seigneurs of Provence, for such in every case the Troubadours were, had not been led to their idyllic theory of life by effeminacy or by the indolent device of shirking a martial career. So far as feats of arms were concerned, they might boast as fair a schedule as any other knights of that day in Europe could show. They were all obliged to pass the three orders of chivalry and to evince their courage by some sufficient exploit, before they were allowed by their brethren to settle down to peace and music in Provence as "Doctors of the Gay Science" and "Most Redoubtable Companions of the Golden Violet"—for by such fantastic terms did they dub their fraternity. But then, the necessary training of a gentleman over, they began their strange life in earnest—and surely such a quaint *mélange* of serious art, fanciful folly and romantic adventure has never existed in history, nor can exist again.

During the winter, the Troubadour passed his time in his castle, varying his leisure with the composition of songs and the training of his attendant squires, or *jongleurs*, in the practice of musical instruments.

For unlike the squires of other knights, those of the Troubadour were chosen solely for their skill in music, and were mostly the itinerant minstrels of the time, known as jongleurs, who were engaged, often at very high fees, to act as accompanists.

When the first breath of spring appeared, the Troubadour sallied from his castle "to go a-courting," as the phrase was—that is to say, to play the knight-errant during the whole forthcoming year, with this

sole difference from the usual method, that his feats were to be achieved by music and not by arms. Mounted on his steed, and abandoning himself to delightful contemplation, he gave the reins to the horse and let it carry him where it list, while his jongleurs, on foot in the rear, tuning up their instruments, sang out their master's songs, that echoed through the meadows and woods as they passed along.

In due time they would reach a castle, whither a jongleur had already been despatched in front to notify the Troubadour's coming.

Such visits were common in Provence, and were expected as almost daily occurrences throughout the greater part of the year. Two hundred Troubadours were thus entertained in one year by the Seigneur de Cavaillon, and this was not thought by any means an extraordinary number.

The reception at the castle gates was most ceremonious. The ladies of the castle assisted the Troubadour to dismount from his steed, and divested him of his armour, for being a knight bachelor he always rode in panoply.

During these proceedings, the jongleurs, ranging themselves in a row before the company, began the preface to a concert, which was to continue almost without intermission during the whole of the visit. Arrayed in a costly mantle, he was then led to the banqueting hall; and after dinner carpets of brocade were spread on the grass in the meadows outside the castle, and the ladies having all assembled there, the Troubadour began to sing. How often he did so was entirely at his own option, as it was a point of etiquette never to solicit him.

The same reserve did not obtain in relation to his squires, for they were constantly requested to furnish music to the company, and their duty was as constantly to comply. The next day our musical errant would bring his visit to a conclusion, and proceed on his wanderings, either to stop at the next château he came to or to follow up any adventure that may have occurred on his way.

One great duty that the profession of Troubadour imposed on its votary was a regular attendance at the Courts of Love.

These strange assemblages were tribunals presided over by the ladies of the district, whose office was to investigate all disputes between husbands and wives or petulant lovers, and to decide any speculative questions in connection with love-making that might be submitted to them.

In these Courts the Troubadours played the part of barristers, and were engaged by the contending disputants to plead their respective causes, not for high fees as with us, but merely for the pleasure of serving distressed beauty or suffering manhood.

Despite the fanciful character of the Courts of Love, the proceedings were entirely au sérieux, and the juries of ladies held in their hands the happiness or misery of most of the homes in Provence.

Some of the issues submitted to them will amuse us. The Seigneur de Beauclerque summoned his lady before the Court of

his district, because she had feloniously opened a billet-doux intended for his hand alone, and had rated him soundly because the contents were not to her liking. The Court decided that her scolding would have been justifiable if she had administered it from suspicions of the handwriting on the outside of the missive; but that directly she opened the letter, she stood in the light of the recipient, and ought to have observed the same secrecy which her husband would doubtless have taken care to maintain had he received the letter safely.

One celebrated case was as follows.

It was argued before the Court of the Ladies of Gascony: Three Seigneurs of Provence, Savari de Mauléon, the Seigneur de Bergerac, and Geoffrey Rudel had been on a visit to the Vicomtesse de Gavaret. She had held out hopes of her undivided affection to each of them separately beforehand, and on the occasion of their visiting her together had the address to content all three at one and the same moment. She gazed rapturously at Geoffery Rudel, and simultaneously pressed tenderly the hand of the Seigneur de Bergerac, and with her foot pressed the foot of Savari de Mauléon.

The object of the litigation was to decide who had received the greatest favour.

Geoffrey Rudel, who had received the amorous gaze, maintained that the pressure of the hand was a mere courtesy, the touch of the foot might be an accident, but that a look arises from the soul.

The Seigneur de Bergerac, whose hand had been pressed, insisted that the look was of no consequence, since kind looks are given to all; the touch of the foot was no great intimacy, because the foot was covered; but when a white hand without glove presses tenderly your own, it is a sign that genuine love is present.

With still more convincing eloquence did Savari de Mauléon defend the foot—and the ladies after a long debate decided in his favour.

The Courts were held either in the castle halls or in the meadow of the tilting-ground, but more generally in the former. Fifty or sixty ladies were impannelled as the jury, and they sat on a horseshoe daïs overlooking the spacious floor, which was arranged in the manner of an arena, with tiers of seats at the end for spectators. In the arena stood the contending Troubadours, with their guitars, facing each other, and behind them the ladies or gentlemen whose cause they championed. The entire pleading was managed in music.

"For first," says a contemporary chronicler, describing the proceedings, "the Troubadour who laid the charge touched the strings of his guitar and lisped off the indictment in the sweetest music, which he had either prepared beforehand, or else with the skill which was so common among these brave gentlemen, extemporised his verses and his tunes as he went on. Then the advocate of the defendant replied, and similarly in verses and melody. Then the first retorted again, and so they proceeded, each endeavouring to

outdo the other in the sweetness of his singing and the beauty of his expression—nay! of so much importance were these arts considered that often the best singer, though he had the worst case, would win."

We may take it that never before nor since then has music ever succeeded in becoming so consummate a medium of expression as this account points to.

Music with the Troubadours seems to have lost entirely its character of a deliberate art, and to have passed into a natural style of utterance which they preferred to any other for giving vent to their feelings and their thoughts. Not only in times of ease and enjoyment did it serve them perfectly in such a function, but in moments of danger, in battles and sieges—since such things did occur to mar their beautiful life—when the bravest might well have sunk to common speech, we still hear of the Troubadours speaking the language of music.

At the sieges of Carcassone and Toulouse, "the leading knights, who were some of the greatest of the Troubadours, stood on the ramparts amid the hail of darts, encouraging by war-songs the panic-stricken soldiers." And at the battle of Muret, in which most of the Provençal nobility engaged, "they marched in bodies about the field," says the chronicler, "fighting and singing; and as their songs grew fainter, so might we know that many gallant hearts were falling, but when the melody rose clear and strong in the air amid the clashing of arms all round, then were we assured that victory smiled in that quarter of the field."

## A MODERN INCIDENT.

THE wind was rising and the Captain's temper had risen, yet the *Anna Maria* was but just started on her voyage, which practically begins with the departure of the pilot.

Now the pilot was no sooner out of hail, and thus the last land-link severed until the *Anna Maria* should reach her destination in foreign parts, than a most annoying discovery was brought to the Captain's notice. None other than a stowaway, grabbed out by the cook from behind the flour-barrels.

A stunted, wizened, miserable larrikin, who would have been sea-sick but that terror for the moment overmastered him; on whose skeleton limbs hung the frowsy remnants of other vagrants' clothing; down whose dirty cheeks trickled tears which were rubbed and kneaded away with dirtier hands.

The cook held him fast by one ear as he explained to the Captain how he had found him; and the Captain's majestic figure towered over both, while his brows were bent into a blood-curdling frown.

The stowaway ever and again glanced furtively upwards, with that mingled propitiation and endurance which distinguishes the expression of a much-beaten cur.

When the recital came to an end, the Captain maintained an awful silence. The captive looked desperately round on the darkening sky, the heaving deck, the blusterous sea.

"What did you do it for?" asked the Captain sternly.

"I dunno," muttered the stowaway, and kneaded his eyes. His red, raw hands were covered with broken chilblains, and one of his bare feet was bound up in a grimy, blood-stained rag.

"You thought it was a nice, easy, do-nothing life, with lots to eat and plenty of time to eat it in, eh?" said the Captain, with such ominous irony in his voice that the stowaway fell to blubbering outright.

"You deserve a taste of the rope's end," continued his judge, sternly; "and the next time I see you on this deck you'll get it, too. Take him for'ard, Blake; he's got a bout of sea-sickness before him, and when he finds his legs again, work him; work him well."

From a little distance on the deck three spectators had witnessed this interview. These were Fleet, the first mate; Macnab, a doctor, who, being a friend of the first mate, had been allowed to take a passage for health's sake on board the *Anna Maria;* and Tennyson Tupper, the supercargo. Now, when the Captain turned and strode moodily down to dinner, they followed him, exchanging sundry nods and comments.

But the Doctor and Mr. Tupper took their places at the table in

silence. It was only Fleet who, with his jolly laugh, dared plunge at once into the burning question.

"So we've got an addition to our numbers, sir? Well, the more the merrier, say I. Let us drink success to the voyage, and to the judicious young gentleman who, out of all the ships in harbour, selected the *Anna Maria* for the honour of his company. First to the voyage!"

The Captain gave an oath and an impatient chink to the glass which Fleet held out to him; at the same moment the ship lurched to starboard, and the glass and its contents, together with two plates and a pickle-fork, went spinning off the table into Mr. Tupper's cabin, the door of which unfortunately stood open. Before settling to rest in Mr. Tupper's berth, one of the plates completely smashed a triple shaving-mirror, its owner's most cherished possession.

With renewed objurgations, the Captain asked the steward why the devil he didn't put on the fiddles? while Fleet, nothing daunted, filled a second glass and proposed toast number two.

"Here's to the stowaway! May he live to be a credit to the *Anna Maria*, and add a laurel to the glory of her gallant Captain!"

Fleet and Macnab drank this toast by themselves. The Captain merely gave an exclamation, and refused to carry the wine to his lips; and Tupper, wondering why the smell of roast pork made him feel so flatulent, meditated a request to the steward for a nip of brandy.

"Dinna fash yoursel', Captin'," said Macnab presently when the wine had warmed him; "it's a gran' worruk you'll be doin', sirr, in savin' that puir bit laddie frae the untole evils of the streets. It's a worruk of pheelanthropy, sirr!"

"Unlucky little beggar!" cried Fleet; "perhaps he would doubt the philanthropy if he knew what he's before him. It's a dog's life for the best of us."

Fleet, rosiest, most rubicund of sailors, always spoke of his profession in this disparaging fashion.

"I winna deespute he's oncomfortable enough at the present moment," agreed Macnab with a chuckle; "I hear he's verra seeck. But it's an expeerience, mon, it's an expeerience, and expeerience is the ane royal road to knowledge."

"Tupper seems a good way along the road then, doesn't he?" whispered Fleet, nudging the Doctor.

The Supercargo was become, indeed, of a cadaverous colour; although, having obtained the brandy, he was in reality feeling better, and anxious to talk to keep up his courage.

"I must have a chat with that boy one of these days," said he; "there was a something in his eye which interested me. And there is also something interesting in his circumstances. Yesterday a denizen of the fetid alley, to-day riding on the bosom of the ocean, the centre of immensities! I must find out what impression this sudden introduction to Nature makes upon his young spirit."

"You are sentimental, sirr!" cried the Doctor; "never mine the immensities yet awhile. Let us furrest thry to pit a wee bit flesh on the lad's bones, which are loupin' thrae his skin. Let us thry to arrest the consumption which has a'reddy set its fangs upon him. Let us thry what science can do in a han' to han' wrastle wi' disease. No that I'm doubtin' for ane moment wha'll triumph! Supported by my meenistrations, I undertake to say, sirrs, science will romp home by sax lengths. An' I'll back my opeenion by thretty to twa—in ha'pennies!"

"Oh, we'll turn the boy into a smart sailor yet!" declared Fleet; "plenty of sea-air, salt meat and biscuits will do more for him than any of your nostrums, Doctor. It's wonderful how those young vagabonds fill out and improve, once they get their regular tucker. I'm inclined to believe that four square meals a day do more for a man than all the science in the world, and all the poetry added."

Tupper took another reviving dramful.

"You look upon man, Fleet," he remarked disdainfully, "as a merely superior brute, while Macnab there considers him as raw material for experiments. But in reality he is allied by the poetic instincts, which you both ignore, to the Angels, the Powers, and the Dominations; and from the bosom of every man, if you do but finger the right chord, celestial melodies may be rung forth. I shall take this poor waif—so soon as he is scoured down and has had his hair brushed—and endeavour to initiate him into the meaning of those higher mysteries without an acquaintance with which all corporeal benefits become as dead-sea fruit."

The Captain had already given signs of a ferocious irritability. Now he broke forth.

"One might be listening to a parcel of vapourish women, rather than sensible men," said he abruptly; "the subject of your conversation is a miserable, ricketty creature, diseased in body and depraved in mind; the scandalous product of generations of past sin. Macnab's medicines will no more give him health or strength than will Fleet's regimen, and though Tupper might perhaps instil a little bad poetry into his feeble brain, I don't see any cause for congratulation in that. The kindest and the wisest course would be to sweep him off the face of the earth altogether, and this could be done by leaving him severely alone. You can read in his face that he has not the vitality to attain manhood. To lend him a factitious strength is to enable him to hand on the curse he has inherited from his parents, and to add another scourge to the inferno of our great cities. Do you imagine that once set down on dry land again he will not drift back to a life as bad or worse than that from which he came? There are no more the makings of a sailor in him than there are the makings of anything else that is decent or respectable, and if I could have my way, I would stamp out all such vermin pitilessly, for

very humanity's sake, that the plague spot of their evil-living should not contaminate those around them."

His listeners exclaimed with warmth against the barbarity of these views, which jarred equally on Fleet's easy tolerance, Macnab's "pheelanthropy" and Tupper's young enthusiasms.

"It's a fearfu' thing to tak' life," said Macnab "withoutten it be in the interests of science, but even she demands the carefu' preesarvation rather than the destruction of every pathologocal speecimen."

"And after all," said Fleet, "the poor wretch probably enjoys his life in his own way as much as we do ours. Offer him the most delicate euthanasia from Macnab's phials, and he wouldn't thank you. A living dog, you know, is better than a dead lion."

"He is a human soul," said the Supercargo, "and so more precious than all the treasures of the deep. The cynical lightness with which you discuss his fate positively revolts me. The really humane man steps aside to avoid the worm upon his path, and will not crush with his foot the beetle perambulating his cabin floor—he calls in the steward to do it instead. But the conversation has entered low, depressing, and vulgar channels. Let us for the nonce forget the stowaway, fill our glasses, and with our Captain's permission, drink to the loved ones at home."

"To my mother and the flourishing auctioneer she has just given me for a step-father!" cried Fleet with a grimace.

"To the douce and bonnie widow wi' the bawbees I am yet to woo and win!" cried Macnab.

"To all the dear creatures," said Tupper, "who at the present moment read my poems and bewail my departure—to Ethel and Maud, Blanche and Alice, Phyllis, Muriel, Dolly."

"Whisht wi' your clishmaclavers!" interrupted the Doctor; "just han' roun' the whiskey stoup, mon, an' we'll toast all your braw doxies together."

The Captain raised his glass in silent abstraction. His eye softened as he thought of his young wife, of his three boys, of the quiet homestead embosomed among English trees, where alone he might unbend from authority and become his kindly self.

There was a violent shock forward. Everything on the table jerked up into the air as though the board had been struck a sharp blow underneath. A strange, shuddering groan ran through the beams of the ship from prow to stern. A still stranger silence followed.

The men rose from the dinner-table and stared at each other in consternation. At the same moment the second mate opened the cabin door, calling urgently for the Captain.

He and the rest ran up on deck to find a scene of unimaginable confusion. The storm was at its height, wind and water raged tempestuously, all hands were gathered together, all voices clamoured at once.

"We've struck . . . we're on the Margaret reef . . . we passed

the Margaret reef . . . that there's Ness Point . . . we're sinkin' . . . we'll be down in two seconds . . . we'll last awhile yet . . . the water's risin' . . . we're lost . . . ! "

For a moment the Captain stood motionless, while hurrying thoughts clashed with and crossed each other in his brain. Then he realised that any hope of saving the *Anna Maria* was gone. She had struck upon a rock, a great hole was bored in her side, and still in sight of shore she was rapidly sinking. He seized a marling-spike. "Silence ! " he thundered ; "the first man who speaks, I fell him to the ground ! Lower the boats."

His gestures were understood ; his words were inaudible ; the men carried out his instructions, but the sea laughed him to scorn. The waves laid hold of the poor cockle-shells, tossed them hither and thither with contempt, whirled them round, turned them over, crushed them into matchwood against the sides of the ship and dispersed the fragments near and far.

The Captain made a trumpet with his hands and shouted to the men who stood three feet away: "There is nothing more to be done. I can save neither you nor the ship. In five minutes from now she will have found the bottom. Let every man take a life-belt and strike out for the shore. It is your only chance. Distribute the belts."

There was a belt to every man on board. Each sailor slipped the apparatus over his head and shoulders, looked from the mountainous sea to the face of his Captain and, obeying the order written there, sprang from the bulwarks to begin the desperately unequal struggle with Fate. For a few seconds a white face gleamed here and there upon the black waters, then the rolling waves carried them all from sight.

The Captain, Macnab, Fleet and the Supercargo stood together ; four belts lay at their feet. A fifth figure drew near and fixed its eyes, full of longing and despair, now on the belts, now on each of the four men to whom they were reserved. It was the stowaway, and as his sea-sickness had left him through terror of the Captain, so this terror in turn had vanished completely before the greater terror of Death. He glared at the coveted belts, and would have taken one by force had he possessed the strength ; he would have filched one by fraud could he have found the opportunity.

Simultaneously, the four men recognised his presence, and three of the faces expressed a furious egotism that equalled his own. Each saw in him a possible disputant for his own chance of life. Fleet, with cheeks still constitutionally rosy, had lost his habitual smile ; Macnab had braced every nerve and energy to the task of saving the precious disciple of science ; Tupper, though scarcely more pale than before, had abandoned affectation and revealed in every lineament the natural man, a trembling animal, no higher in the scale than the stowaway himself.

"There is no time to lose," shouted the Captain, and before the words were out of his mouth, the three men had seized the belts nearest to them and plunged into the sea. Fleet was the last. He looked back towards his Captain. "Come!" he called.

But the Captain was attaching the last belt round the shoulders of the stowaway. "You cannot swim? Then keep your mouth shut, don't struggle, but let the waves carry you. With God's help you may reach the shore."

At this supreme moment it did not occur to the Captain which of the two, he or the stowaway, was fittest to survive; he saw only in the miserable creature a being whose helplessness laid a claim upon his own strength, and he sacrificed his life's chance for him as unhesitatingly as he would have sacrificed it for a woman or a child. The action appeared to him so natural and so inevitable that perhaps on this account he deserves no praise.

Which was probably the view taken by the stowaway himself, for without a word of thanks, he turned, ran to the taff-rail and sprang far out into the sea.

The Captain paced his deck a solitary man between the storming wind and waves.

The rats, driven out from their last hiding-place, swarmed about his feet for protection, and he could see their bright and suppliant eyes reading his own.

Then, with a roar and rush of water, he and they were swept apart, fathoms down into darkness, and the man, after a brief agony, a long joy-dream, lay at rest.

Of the remainder of the crew of the *Anna Maria*—by one of those strange freaks of Fortune, who seems almost sentient in her malignancy—only the supercargo and the stowaway reached the shore alive. They crawled feebly above the tide-line, and for long appeared mere inanimate bundles of drenched cloth and clouts.

But when the sun rose next morning these two rose also, recognised each other and, exchanging glances of contempt and hatred, crept off in different directions.

And there, like certain noxious plant-growths, each in his separate sphere thrives apace to this day.

GILBERT H. PAGE.

# THE BRETONS AT HOME.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Letters from Majorca," "Through Holland," etc.

Asking Alms.

IT is a long flight from Quimper to Guingamp. The former lies almost in sound of the waves of the Atlantic; in the latter you might almost hear the beating of the Channel. The tide of the ocean regulates the ebb and flow of the river of Quimper; the Channel supplies the Trieux, on which Guingamp stands in such picturesque repose.

A long flight for so small a country as Brittany, traversing almost the whole of Finistère. Moreover, not being a crow, you cannot accomplish the journey as the crow flies, though with a writer and reader's privilege, we may do so in imagination. The time has indeed come when we must do so. Much as we like Quimper, for the sake of its associations: its cathedral, its lovely precincts, haunted by a remembrance of the Canon, Adrien, our charming and gentle Mademoiselle Ponpon: we cannot linger here for ever; and Quimper itself was so depressing and uncomfortable that we left it without very deep regret.

Let us suppose our flight accomplished, the journey through the air safely taken—on a broomstick or with the help of wings, or on the magic carpet, according to your pleasure—and we happily alighted; not on the chimney-pots of Guingamp, but in the antiquated and rather homely quarters of an inn, where winding staircases conduct you from floor to floor, and narrow passages and ill-fitting doors and a hundred other small signs remind you that Brittany is a century behind its time.

You shall take this flight, reader, though we never took it ourselves; never even employed the slow, sure-going railroad. For these recollections of Brittany are not the result of one visit, but of many, and we have intertwined times and seasons and incidents, making, as far as was possible, one picture, one record of many

experiences. We never ourselves went from Quimper to Guingamp; the latter was almost our very first experience of Brittany, whilst Quimper was one of our last.

We entered Guingamp one very bright evening, full of hope as to our wanderings through that primitive country. The sky was clear and cloudless, the air soft and warm. The town seemed quiet and full of repose. The rattling omnibus awoke the echoes and startled the air. The driver cracked his whip as though he would rouse the sleepers and bring them out to weed the grass that grew in their streets. Not that Guingamp had gone to repose when we first made its acquaintance: the sun though nearing the horizon, was still above it.

It was soon evident that a great deal of the quaint and old-world was still left to Guingamp; and, being one of our first experiences of Brittany, it was one of our most vivid and interesting. We had not heard very much of the old town; its reputation had not gone before it—that dangerous test to talent of every kind. One hears much of other towns in this little country; there are scenes so frequently painted by artists, that they are as familiar to the Londoner who has never travelled twenty miles from his native town (if such a marvel can still be found) as to the Breton himself.

But Guingamp is less known and visited. At the hotel we were the only roving guests; the remainder were a medley of commercial travellers—frequent birds of passage and habitués of the house—and a number of officers who, quartered in the town, took their meals here en pension; coming and going with a great clashing of swords and talk and laughter; taking coffee afterwards at the little table in the narrow, uninteresting courtyard or the closer and still more confined café, according to the caprices of the weather.

This small réunion in and out of the hotel was the first sign of noise, movement and quiet excitement that greeted us in Guingamp.

Nevertheless the little place is by no means asleep. In a quiet way its inhabitants are prosperous, happy and contented. The town is certainly behind the times, but not specially behind Brittany. Its inn was amongst the most primitive, which is saying a great deal; but it was clean and not uncomfortable; the women who waited upon us were amongst the most clumsy, the most incomprehensible in language, the least picturesque; the landlord was not exactly a man of resources, or he would have wakened up a little more to the needs of the declining century; and the one waiter who commanded the women-folk, evidently domineered over them and was therefore adored by them, would have gone about his work with a little more system, without such breathless endeavours to be in twenty places at once. To us, who like the commercial travellers were birds of passage, though not habitués, it was all very amusing. They were so many studies of character, these people; new types; for as yet, Brittany was almost as unknown as its language.

It had been difficult to believe that in these days of rapid communication, any country within reach could be a century behind the times; but the experience came to us. A pleasant experience in Guingamp, though not always so in remoter districts.

In one way we were disappointed—Guingamp showed us few costumes. The inhabitants have to a great extent discarded them, here and elsewhere. So far they are in advance of their times: beginning, as in many other circumstances of life, at the wrong end. Only on the day of its Pardon, and on other high days and holidays, will costumes be seen in the streets of Guingamp.

On such occasions the town looks its best. It still possesses much that is picturesque: gabled houses, latticed panes, overhanging eaves full of romantic and mediæval suggestions. These make Guingamp well worth visiting, and the day of its Pardon will give you one of Brittany's most characteristic sights. Villagers flock to the town from far and near, all in their Sunday's best; very many in costume; every village, perhaps, varying in some essential detail. It becomes almost a carnival, without the wild rioting that masking always leads to. But—as we have already remarked—the Bretons take their pleasures more soberly than the hot and impetuous southerners; there is more slowness and stability in their character. They possess a more lively conscience, which is rarely lulled to sleep; a more profound sense of religion; with them it is not all superstition, but a reality which influences their lives and bears good though not always very generous fruit. It is the one thing which saves them, for they are not generally wise or clever; and their sense of religion keeps them from those errors and excesses which are usually the result of ignorance. The men, it is true, give way to drink, ruin their health and probably hand down the inevitable retribution to posterity; taking the abominable spirit of the country with as much persistency as the Parisian takes his absinthe; but the time may come when this, too, will yield to better influences, as continual dropping will wear away a stone; and then the Breton type will develop, and the solidity of their character will raise them out of the lethargy that with them is a long inheritance.

We had settled ourselves at the hotel. Madame had politely assured us that we could only have rooms on the second floor, and Monsieur had duly regretted that we had not announced our arrival by letter. We replied that we preferred the second to the first floor, where there is generally a little more air to breathe. It was especially so on this occasion, for the inn was in a narrow street crowded with houses, though standing back in its courtyard; and the roofs on which we gazed were far more open and picturesque than the dead walls of the lower storey. We found interest even in the blue smoke that curled out of the chimneys, scattered abroad a peat scent and vanished into thin air. Our rooms were so

small that we could scarcely turn round in them, and had to make up for the deficiency in cubic inches by sleeping with windows wide open.. Still they were our very own for the time being, and in travelling out of the beaten track one learns to be thankful for small mercies. These unbeaten tracks have their infinite compensation. As Monsieur X. said, at Concarneau, it is good to pass into the quiet by-ways of the world, where we are not overweighted by a multitude who seem to have found out the secret of perpetual motion, and drown the *Lieder ohne Worte* nature is for ever singing with voices that have no music in them.

"We have larger rooms," Madame had said, when she came up with us, escorted by a sturdy Breton maiden, who carried our baggage and looked capable of lifting a ton weight without turning a hair. "We have larger rooms," said Madame, who seemed to expand as she reiterated the assertion, "but they are occupied. Our commercial travellers have to be studied—they are the backbone of our business; and just now we have put up several friends belonging to the officers who are our pensionnaires. Being the chief hotel of the town, we are naturally patronized by all the military element, and the noblesse of the surrounding country always descend here. Mettez-là, Marie-Justine-Amatalide," concluded Madame, breathless with conversation and mounting the rough and winding staircase.

"Mettez-là" referred to our traps. The only available spot in the room was the top of a small chest of drawers, and each room received its due proportion. "Je vous salue, messieurs," said Marie-Justine-Amatalide, a quaint greeting we received for the first and last time in Brittany on such an occasion. And then she descended the bare staircase with as much noise as a heavy dragoon. This sturdy woman was a true Breton specimen. As vivandière she would have followed a regiment all over the world and passed bravely under fire. We felt that if Marie-Justine-Amatalide possessed a brother, he would fight to the death.

"Yes," said Madame, rightly interpreting our gaze, "the room is small; but," throwing wide the window, "you have *le bel air*. I assure you that when Monsieur le Comte de Montesquieu de la Roche-jaquelaine de la Pépinière comes to Guingamp, he prefers this room to any other."

Merciful Powers! Would every person we came across in Brittany possess such a terrible array of names?

"And does Monsieur le Comte de Montesquieu de la Roche-jaquelaine de la Pépinière prefer his washstand in the passage?" we asked; for that important article of furniture was airing itself outside the door of the room. "It is rather a public way of dressing for so illustrious a personage."

"Ah! pardon! une petite accident," cried Madame, who, like her maid, Marie-Justine-Amatalide, was true Breton, and therefore liable to

mix her genders. "We place it outside for the sake of convenience in doing the room. Here is its place," indicating a recess about eighteen inches wide. "Everything fits perfectly, and is very comfortable. You might give yourself quite a bath here. By-and-by you will want dinner, but I recommend you first to go up to the church. If you wait until after dinner, it will be closed, and night will have

GUINGAMP.

come, and your first coup d'œil of Guingamp will be confused and unsatisfactory. For of course you saw nothing in that terrible omnibus. How it shakes one's bones, and makes one's very teeth rattle! I always say that in paving the streets they put the hard ends of the stones upwards. Allons! A tantôt, messieurs! Bonne promenade, bonne appétite."

With Madame apparently everything was feminine—perhaps in honour of her own sex. She was half-way down-stairs when the

amiable wish was delivered, and we heard her still running on as we passed through the passage into the courtyard. In short, we found that Madame's voice was never silent; but it was an amiable voice; she never scolded; there was nothing of the shrew about her. Her pleasure was to talk and bustle about and feel herself an indispensable element in the welfare of the establishment.

"C'est une brave dame," said Monsieur to us later in the evening. "I don't know what I should do without her. It is true, she is always talking, but in her case it is such an amiable weakness! The whole household will do anything for her."

In the meantime we had taken Madame's advice and gone out to inspect the wonders of the town.

And if they are not exactly wonders, at least they lay claim to much that is interesting. Like Quimper, Guingamp is a mixture of past and present; only it is far smaller than Quimper; there is less of the past, and the present is unromantic and aggressive. Yet here and there you obtain a view that even Quimper will not give you. Go, for instance, to the outskirts of the town; stand on the bridge that spans the little river. You then see that Guingamp is more or less built on a slope, the centre of a vast, rich valley closed in by various chains of hills. The whole scene is striking and beautiful. The river has narrowed into a small stream, winding about in capricious, picturesque form. On one side it is confined by quaint and ancient houses, the very outskirts of the town; houses that might have been there, with their grey walls and lattices, from time immemorial. On the other side you have rich undulating banks of emerald green, whilst small willows and other trees bend gracefully over the stream and contemplate their own reflections.

Rising upon the slopes are the houses of the town; a wonderful vision of old roofs: grey, as all Brittany roofs are; gabled, slanting, every conceivable form; some with dormer windows, others an unbroken surface of slate; an endless accumulation, an infinite variety. Crowning all, on the very summit of the height, is the magnificent church, its massive towers and tall steeple almost lost in the clouds.

And the view is almost finer on a cloudy than a sunny day. The latter, it is true, brings out bold lights and shadows, sparkles and flashes upon the running water, glints upon the frothy foam thrown out by yonder water-wheel which turns the mill and grinds the corn; bids the world rejoice and be happy: but it is essentially a subdued picture; a study in grey: grey walls, grey roofs, grey towers and steeple to the ancient church; when the skies are grey also, they throw upon all a tone and depth more beautiful and poetical even than the magic of the laughing sunshine. Everything then is in distinct harmony, and it is one of the most striking and remarkable scenes in all Brittany—a country overflowing with old-world pictures.

The sun was declining, the shadows were lengthening in Guingamp. We passed through the very ordinary courtyard, where three or four officers were drinking Vermouth and Malaga by way of forcing an appetite for dinner. They did not seem particularly cultivated or refined, but bowed very civilly as we went by: an unexpected and kindly recognition of our rights, as strangers, to hospitality, for which we were grateful and responsive.

The immediate surroundings of the hotel are not interesting; but we soon reached the quaint market-place, or Place de la Pompe, as it is called. Many of the houses are very antiquated, with gabled roofs and latticed panes, and here and there a small turret built up like a swallow's nest. In the centre of this irregular square is a remarkable and beautiful fountain in the form of three basins, one above another, crowned by an image of the Virgin, from whose feet the water flows into the basins below. The second basin reposes upon sea-horses and nymphs. It dates from the fifteenth century, but has been frequently restored. The statue of the Virgin is the work of the famous sculptor Corlay, the other statues and ornamentations are Renaissance.

The whole scene was very striking, for at the further end, where the Place narrowed into a street, the view was closed in by the church. The doorway was conspicuous, and above all were the massive towers and spire, grey, venerable and dignified.

We stood long before this remarkable composition. It was, as I have said, one of our first experiences of Brittany; and from an artistic point of view, we felt that we had entered a land flowing with milk and honey. If our days were to be spent in a succession of such experiences, there would be danger of a surfeit of good things. Fortunately both mind and spirit have an infinite capacity for receiving and retaining impressions: pictures and experiences succeed each other, and all are carefully laid aside in the caverns of memory, to be separately withdrawn and examined in the future.

The church of Guingamp is a singular construction, contradictory in style, badly placed in point of the surrounding houses, which crowd and almost support it on either side; but, on the whole, it is very imposing. Especially so is the interior, which is partly Gothic, partly Revival, and is dedicated to Notre-Dame de Bon Secours. In the twelfth century it served as chapel to the first Counts of Penthièvre, and lords of Guingamp through Hadoïse, who brought the town as her marriage portion to Etienne of Penthièvre, brother of Alain V., Duke of Brittany. The present church was reconstructed at periods stretching from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, a sufficient reason for its curious and unequal architecture. The west doorway, supported by two massive towers, is sixteenth century, and is profusely ornamented with garlands of flowers and statues of the twelve apostles. The clock tower alone is thirteenth century; its companion, having fallen in 1535, was rebuilt soon after in the style of the Renaissance.

On the north side are two magnificent porches, one open to the nave, the other to the transept. Both are capable of containing quite a small congregation and are fitted up with altars, where people tell their beads and burn candles to the saints. Very often you may see a number of worshippers in these porches, whilst the rest of the building is silent and deserted. Country people, or busy people of the town, who come in hurriedly to tell their beads or to say a prayer; and, their devotions over, hurry away again about their work. It is good that churches should be thus open, so that those who wish it should have an opportunity of a moment's retirement from the world: a breathing pause, during which the spirit may gather strength for the conflict between good and evil, the ceaseless struggle and battle of life.

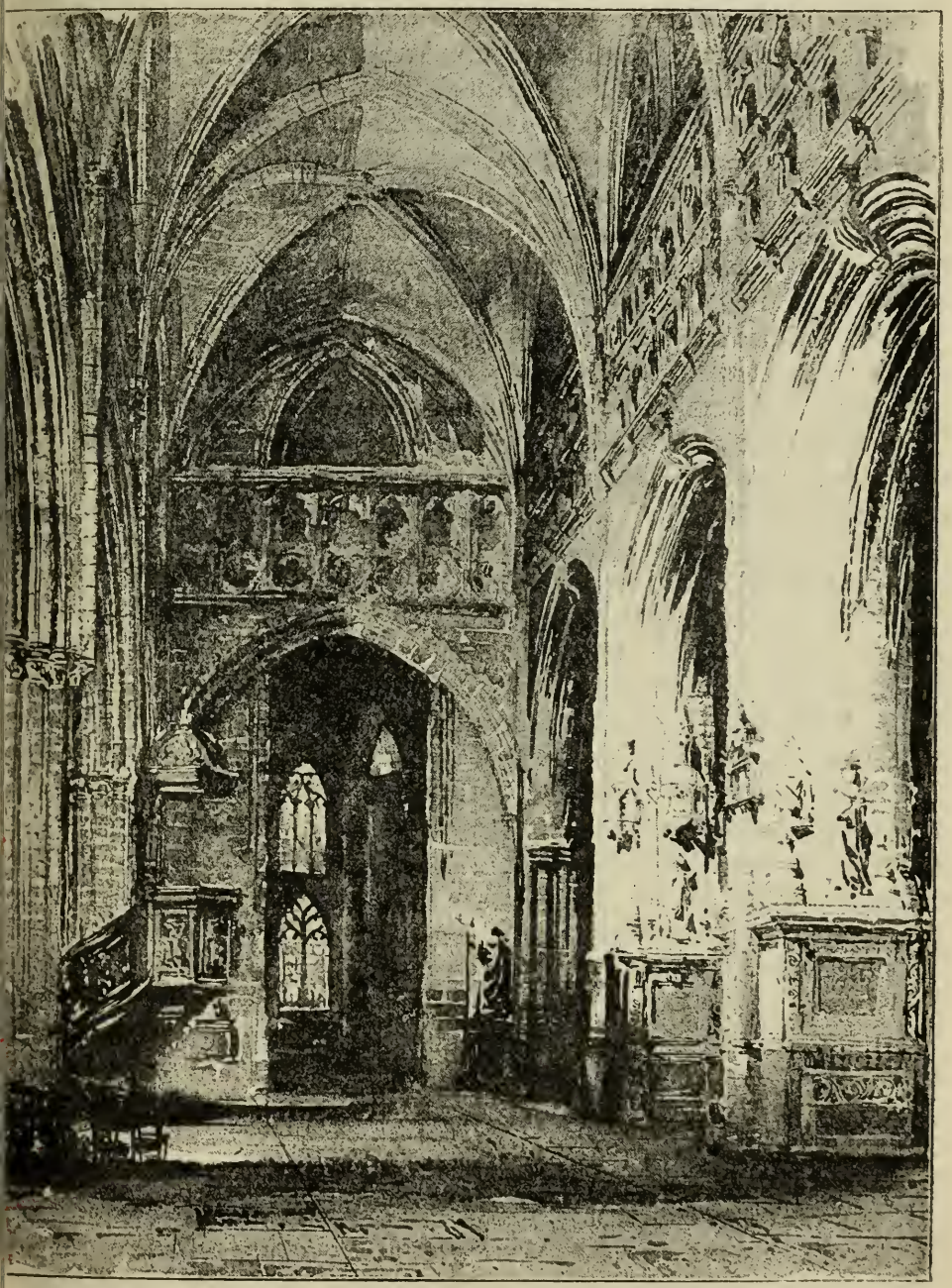
One of these porches, opening to the nave, and of the thirteenth century, is enclosed by some magnificent fourteenth century iron work, and contains a celebrated statue of the Virgin, *Notre-Dame du Halgoët*, from which the church takes its name. The clergy consider it one of their most precious relics; it is supposed to work miracles, and graces all their religious processions. The porch has recently been restored and richly decorated.

The central tower is thirteenth century, and the spire which crowns it was added a century later. One of the four pinnacles at its base has disappeared. The south tower fell in 1535, and to this is due the contradictory styles of architecture in the nave, which on one side is Gothic, on the other Renaissance. The effect is rare and unusual, but not unpleasing. A great deal in the church is good and excellent. In the choir are two galleries or triforiums, one above the other, both dating from the latter half of the fifteenth century. The chapel containing the treasures is older, dating from 1371. The arching of the roof is very good. The whole effect of the building is massive and imposing rather than light and elegant. The organ-case is a specimen of magnificent wood-carving. The windows are modern, but very little light penetrates into the church. This rather adds to its massive appearance, and very much to the element of mystery.

The exterior, as we have said, is badly placed. It is crowded by houses built up to its very walls. Passing under an archway, you come upon a small irregular space; the back of the church forming one side, small white-faced cottages enclosing the other. They can hardly be called sacred precincts, for some are devoted to very secular uses. One or two are small cabarets; another is ornamented with a barber's pole and a brass dish, and the snipping of scissors may be heard within. The arrangement is primitive; the one downstairs room is devoted to the science, the door stands wide, and the luckless patient is revealed to the gaze of the idle and the curious, and the gibes of the street arabs.

All this was visible in our first walk through Guingamp. We noted

nany quaint points in the town; stood long before many an old tone and timber house with their gabled roof and dormer windows, r corbelled angle turrets: charms so rarely found out of Brittany.



GUINGAMP CHURCH (INTERIOR).

e went up through the market place, with its picturesque old ntain, where the running water makes perpetual music and the sign, worn and refined with time, rather reminds one of a sculptor's

dream. Onward into the narrowing street, where the towers and spire of the church looked so venerable and dignified, and the porch, right in our pathway, invited one to enter.

The brightness of the day had faded into the evening shadows. The windows of the church—as many as were visible—gleamed upon us; the interior was evidently lighted up. We passed in, and suddenly stood before a scene never to be forgotten.

We thought to find the church empty, excepting perhaps for a few figures kneeling in quiet shadows. Instead of which we found service going on and the building crowded. One of the porches already described was brilliantly lighted up. At the altar stood a priest in gorgeous robes, facing the people, his hands raised in the attitude of benediction. All figures were kneeling, all heads were bowed. Absolute silence reigned.

In contrast with the light of the chapel, the church was shrouded in that deep semi-obscurity which is so wonderfully impressive and effective. Here and there a light gleamed like a star suspended in mid air: all other light was borrowed from the chapel. It also was crowded with kneeling figures, motionless and worshipping with bent heads. Deep shadows stood out everywhere, relieved only where pillars and aisles and arches caught the light reflected from the chapel.

Most of the kneeling figures wore white caps, whilst many of the dresses were black; and so weird was the effect that at the first moment we almost seemed to be gazing upon an army of nuns just risen from their graves. There was no sound or motion in the whole building. In the gloom, pillars and aisles and arches all seemed magnified and multiplied. The distant end beyond the choir might have been miles away; the congregation a multitude. It all composed with an indescribable effect, and it would be difficult to say what element held us so spell-bound. The kneeling figures; the light gleaming upon the white caps that stood out in such contrast with the deep gloom above them; the undefined outlines of aisles and arches, showing up in such beauty and solemnity; the feeling of infinite space given by the obscurity of the east end; the solemn, mysterious shadows; the porch beyond all, so vivid in its brilliant light; the priest in the attitude of benediction standing out as a central figure full of dignity, delivering a divine commission; all the solemn silence and stillness, as though the whole congregation were waiting for the manifestation of some unseen power or glory: each and all contributed its wonderful and peculiar feature of religious grandeur, mystery and fervour to the scene. We came upon it at the moment when it was most impressive and full of suggestion. We had entered hundreds of churches crowded with worshippers at all hours of the day and night, but had never seen anything approaching this. We had visited buildings that are considered wonders of the world, and that the world travels days and weeks to look upon; but nothing had so impressed us as this scene in the church of Guingamp.

We stood outside the congregation, taking no part in their worship, yet probably more impressed than all; transported, as it seemed, above the world into regions of eternal calm. The solemn silence lasted for many minutes; long after the priest had turned to the altar, and with his back to the kneeling, motionless congregation, seemed to be interceding for his flock or invoking a blessing upon them.

Many minutes passed thus; minutes that to us seemed hours, so much experience and emotion had been concentrated in them. And then, as if we both felt that the harmony of the scene must not be disturbed, and nothing must break in upon its perfection, by a common movement we turned and left the building, while yet the priest prayed at the altar and the people knelt with bowed heads. No sound or movement had disturbed the effect; silently we entered, silently we departed; the door closed behind us as if cased in down; and closed upon the vision.

We felt indeed as if we had seen a vision in which was nothing earthly or tangible. "If I tried to paint it for a hundred years," said H.C. "it could never be done; and if it were once done, I need never attempt another." We longed for its repetition, but it was of those things that never repeat themselves. We paused, we hesitated, we wished to return; no, it must not be; it would not do. The vision stood out perfect and complete; never to be lost or forgotten; so it should remain.

As we passed into the street, quaint and interesting as Guingamp is, it all looked very tame and commonplace. We had come back to the world with a wrench; the transition was too violent: the people about us, good and worthy folk no doubt, were not in any picturesque attitude of devotion, and were occupied with very earthly thoughts and plans. Business has to be attended to; man must work to live; if not always by the sweat of his brow, yet with a weariness to the spirit that is still more painful; life's realities are prosy; these occasional visions and experiences perhaps only make these realities stand out more vividly. The people at their shop doors as we passed seemed to have only one idea and object in life, at the moment: recognizing us as strangers, they wondered whether we should pass by or enter. As we went down the quaint square, where even the fountain seemed a shade less artistic and beautiful than we had so recently thought it, in one of the narrow turnings we thought we heard running water and the sound of a mill-wheel. At the same moment out came a miller, big and stalwart, and crossed to some building out of sight.

Down we went. It was only a few yards, but how it changed the scene—and how lovely the scene we gazed upon! A very different scene from that we had found in the church, which was composed of many elements, every one of them appealing to the spirit, the imagination, the higher emotions.

Here we stood under the broad canopy of heaven, and the earthly

scene was fading in the gloaming. The sun had gone down, the sky was flushed and rosy and threw an intense colouring upon all. A few floating clouds were tinged with red. Streaks of cloud in the far horizon were edged with gold. Between them the colour was fast changing to that lovely opal that is seen only in the north at the hour of sunset.

We stood upon a height, looking downwards where not very long ago we had gazed upwards. We were midway upon the hill. Old-fashioned roofs surrounded us; the backs of quaint and gabled houses, out of whose latticed panes generation after generation had gazed with more or less appreciation and passed away to scenes where summer and winter, and spring and autumn are not, nor scorching suns, nor wintry winds, "nor man's ingratitude, nor friends remember'd not." A fair and lovely scene. The river ran down the steep hill-side, turning the wheel in its course. Lower down, the water ran more smoothly, the houses found their reflection on its surface, the bridge on which we had lately stood, grey, arched and picturesque, closed the view.

Very near us was the mill, and even as we stood, some invisible machinery disconnected it from the water, and it was stopped for the night. Its work was over. Out came the miller, and after a moment's hesitation, as if trying to read whether we were friends or foes, communicative or taciturn, he came up to us.

"You are strangers, sirs," he said. "You are taken with the view, and I am not surprised. It is a wonderful view; a wonderful change in a few yards, from the confinement of yonder Place to all this height and breadth. I have been here, grinding corn, for thirty years, but I never tire of the view. I feel I have a right to it after thirty years: and I look to those grand old towers up there, that fine old bridge below, and say to myself: 'You are all mine; no one can take you from me. As much mine as if I actually owned you, and you furnished me with a revenue.'"

"All its delights without responsibility," we said. "It is a remarkable view, and, once having pitched your tent here, we can understand your remaining."

"It was pitched for me," returned the miller; "my father lived here before me, and my grandfather before him. They were all millers, back to my great-grandfather, and this mill is actually my own, though all the surrounding prospect is not. You have seen the outside of the mill—will you not come in and see the inside also?"

Without being quite in tune for wandering over an old mill, we felt it would not do to decline this hospitable invitation, and followed our leader through all the mazes and intricacies of his domain: squeezed ourselves between crushing-stones, and mounted short ladders which led through trap doors to higher regions. Not that it was anything but a low building. But it stood, as it were, over a precipice and commanded the valley: and now that all in the mill was still, there

GUINGAMP.

was a sound of far-off rippling water, and the trees by the river side bent and kissed their reflections, and the afterglow lighted up the grey roofs and threw a warmth and beauty upon all.

"A sleepy old town," said the miller, "but I grind half its bread and must not complain; and if I possess any friends they are here, for I have none elsewhere."

"Have you never been away?" we asked him.

"I once went to Paris," he replied. "It was the time of the Exhibition. I thought I should have gone mad. The whirl of the streets was far worse than the whirl of my mill-wheels, which, indeed, is so much music to me. In Paris there was no rest, night or day; no breathing. At the end of a week I came home, and I stayed in bed two days to grow calm again. No more Paris for me."

"Here certainly you will find little to distract you," we remarked. "It cannot be very often that Guingamp is roused to excitement and activity.

"Only at the time of its Pardon," he returned. "Have you never seen a Pardon at Guingamp? No? Your first visit here? Your very first day? It is a pity; you should see the Pardon. It is an interesting sight; more so than most Pardons: a mixture of ceremonies, religious and secular. We have pilgrimages, church processions, and National dances in the streets. Everything together makes a sort of carnival of it."

"And when does it take place?" we asked.

"On the Saturday immediately before the 1st of July," he replied. "It is called the Pilgrimage or Pardon de Bon Secours; and our shrine is one of the most frequented in Brittany. They come up to worship before that rubbishing wooden image in the church, Notre-Dame du Halgoët, and it is pretended that it works miracles." Here he shrugged his broad shoulders and put on a look of compassion. "I hope I am not a bad Catholic," he observed, "but I don't believe a word of all their wooden statues and miracles, and no other sensible man would believe it either. And as for telling my beads and going to Confession and all that, it may do for some people—it does not go down with me."

"But at that rate you are not a Catholic at all," we observed. "They would call you a heretic."

"I cannot help it," he returned. "I cannot pretend to believe what I do not, or to be other than what I am. I like to say my prayers, and to be thankful for my mercies, and to ask pardon for my sins; but I like to do it all in the darkness, with the earth for my temple, the sky for my dome, the stars for my witnesses. I feel nearer Heaven at such times than I ever could feel in a crowd with incense burning and bells tinkling and priests processioning."

"But what do your priests say to all this heresy?"

"Oh, they know me well, and leave me alone," he replied with a smile. "They have found out it is useless to interfere with me.

I give my share to the poor, because it is right to do so; right to return a thanksoffering for one's mercies; and that goes a long way with them. Perhaps I have gained some ideas from my mother," he explained; "she was a Protestant; a descendant of the Huguenots; and she was a saint if ever there was one on earth. If I have only lived a tithe of her saintly life when the end comes, I shall have done well. But what brought us to this? Talking of le Pardon, I think. Yes, you should see it. If you will come next year, I will myself be your guide and show you everything."

"It is hardly worth a journey from England," we objected.

"Quite worth it," he returned, "because you would go to other places and see other things also. On that day—the day of the Pardon—the town is up betimes, I promise you. The people are quite excited and buzz about like bees in a barrel. The streets are gay with flags and flowers. People troop in from all the villages round about, from many a distant town. The road from the station is like a fair. The bells of the church ring and clash in the air, just as if there was not noise and stir enough down below. It is a gay scene enough, for you may see no end of costumes. The pilgrims refresh themselves with the water of the fountain, which has been specially blessed for the occasion. The wooden statue of the Virgin is dressed up in gorgeous robes of silk representing archangels, wrought upon an ermine ground. She wears the gold crown specially sent to her in 1857 by the Chapter of Rome on behalf of the Pope. This goes on all the morning. A grand procession parades the streets—it is really a very lively affair, with a larger assemblage of all sorts of Breton folk than you will easily find elsewhere. For, you see, nothing is stronger than superstition and nothing attracts like a miracle-working wooden image. In the afternoon the fair does a great trade and the shows are crowded, for the pilgrims think they have earned their amusement."

Here the miller looked at us comically out of his eyes, and evidently expected us to make some remark about this happy conjunction of the sacred and secular; but feeling on delicate ground, we kept silence.

"You say nothing," he resumed, "but you think all the more; and in many things we are probably of the same opinion. But about the Pardon. When night falls, the most exciting part of the performance begins. The people commence the National dances, and tread their measures to the sound of the bagpipes. I used to enjoy it once, but I have had my day; we are not always twenty. I am quite contented now to look on; more often than not, I don't even stir from my mill. At nine o'clock another procession leaves the church; the wooden statue is solemnly transported to the Place, where three immense fires are lighted. *Feux de joie* they call them. This over, the people go back to their dancing. At midnight a *messe solennelle*

brings the Pardon to an end, the people disperse and the town gradually falls into repose. Yes, as one of the sights of Brittany it is decidedly worth seeing."

We had been standing all this time with our backs to the open window at the top of the mill, the miller leaning against a wooden pillar close to a trap door through which he could gaze into the depths beneath. But from the window there were yet greater depths, upon which the shades of night were now falling rapidly. The after-glow was fading out of the sky, and here and there a star was beginning to shine out, soft and silvery.

"Yes," said the miller, following our gaze, "these are the true wonders, and He who made them will perform our miracles. We do not want the intervention of wooden images. Can you imagine it? Better say one's prayers and make one's confessions here than, boxed up in a wooden partition, to a fellow-mortal and a fellow-sinner. We are nearer Heaven, as I have said."

We left, thinking that if the miller was a type of his country, the Breton character was neither so much behind the times nor so reserved and inhospitable as it was supposed to be. But experience taught us that he was not quite a Breton, either in thought or feeling; his ancestors must have been in advance of their times, and his Huguenot mother had sown wholesome seed. We met him again more than once, and we found him invariably communicative and sensible; a man, amongst his own class, given to good works.

We returned to our inn too late for table d'hôte, which was not a matter of very great regret; especially as Madame was obliging enough to make us "un petit diner apart" all to ourselves. The officers, with their friends, were taking coffee outside on one side the doorway, their clanking swords in full evidence; the commis-voyageurs were on the other side the doorway. The commercial and military elements had evidently nothing in unison with each other. "Like the House of Commons," said H. C. "Conservatives on one side, Radicals on the other. Whenever my Aunt Maria has been especially irritating, I always pretend that I hold the most advanced Radical views. I tease her until she has one of her swooning fits, and when she recovers I am half-way down Park Lane. Then she writes off to her brother, and tells him that if I think of putting up for Parliament he must either keep me out of it or make a convert of me. Uncle Jasper, who despises the Lower House, and says the new reading of the old saying ought to be 'the assemblage of the first shopkeepers in Europe' writes back to her and says the whole thing is hopeless: the country is going to the dogs. I confess that I don't quite see it, but that may be my Radical view of the matter. Of course I'm not really a Radical, but an out-and-out Conservative."

Madame was very good, and even waited upon us with her own light foot and her own fair hands, pressing her best dishes upon us

and declaring that a good appetite was the greatest safeguard against "the little accidents of travel."

"There is nothing like it," she declared. "If you eat well, you may do what you will. The great thing is to keep up the constitution. You may then defy the world."

"What would Lady Maria say to such a creed?" we asked H. C.

"She would use her fan and her vinaigrette, and declare that it served her right for coming to this barbarous country," laughed H. C. "And she would allow herself three crystallized violets less daily by way of penance."

A Peasant.

We, however, under no such conscientious restrictions, did justice to Madame's hospitality, whilst we listened to her praises of Guingamp.

"It is not because I am a Bretonne of Guingamp that I praise it," she said; "though I have counted every stone of its streets in growing up, know every ripple of the river, every blade of grass in the fields, and am friendly with every inhabitant. But it has so many interesting points. I love its old houses—those that remain. It has the best Pardon in Brittany—the national dances with the sound of those lovely bagpipes would delight you. And the procession at night—with that miraculous statue! When they light the fires at nine o'clock, and the flames throw their reflection upon the silken robes and the golden crown, and you gaze upon those saintly features, voyez-vous! you would declare that the eyes flashed fire and the lips moved."

"But do you believe that a wooden image can perform miracles?" we asked gravely.

Madame crossed herself. "Monsieur, if I questioned it for a moment I should say it was a temptation of the diable. What the church tells us we must believe without doubting. Besides, I can speak from experience."

We begged the privilege of her experience.

"I have had many, but here is one of them. My friend, Madame Lannebert, had a child sick unto death. The doctor had given her up. The poor mother in despair went up to church, and asked Notre-Dame du Halgoët to have pity upon her. At the end of a week the child was well again," concluded Madame triumphantly.

"But you confess that there was a doctor in attendance upon the child?"

"And that he had given her up," rapidly returned Madame. "It was a clear case of miracle."

"Have you many excursions from Guingamp?" we asked, to change the subject; for many of the Bretons possess a spirit of controversy in religious matters which they delight to exercise. It is all conscientiously done, and they would suffer martyrdom rather than abate an inch of their convictions.

"We abound in excursions," returned Madame emphatically, as she handed some delicious artichokes to H. C. "There is no end to them. I know their charms by heart. There is Sainte-Croix to begin with, delightfully situated on the right bank of the Trieux, and owing its name and origin to an Abbey of Augustin Monks, founded in 1130 by the Comte de Penthièvre and Hadoïse, who brought him Guingamp as a dowry. I have heard you have an Abbey of Sainte-Croix in England," proceeded Madame, "in one of your cathedral towns; I forget which."

"Winchester," we prompted. "Quite true. We have visited the abbey, and the visit is amongst our pleasantest recollections."

"Ween-ches-terre," repeated Madame with difficulty; "your names are too hard for me. But that is not the only link we have with England. The stuff which you call *gingham*, and with which so many of your umbrellas are made, first came from Guingamp. Gingham" (she pronounced it Geeng-am) "is merely a corruption of Guingamp. Have you not a song which says something about 'Isabella, with the gingham umberella?'"

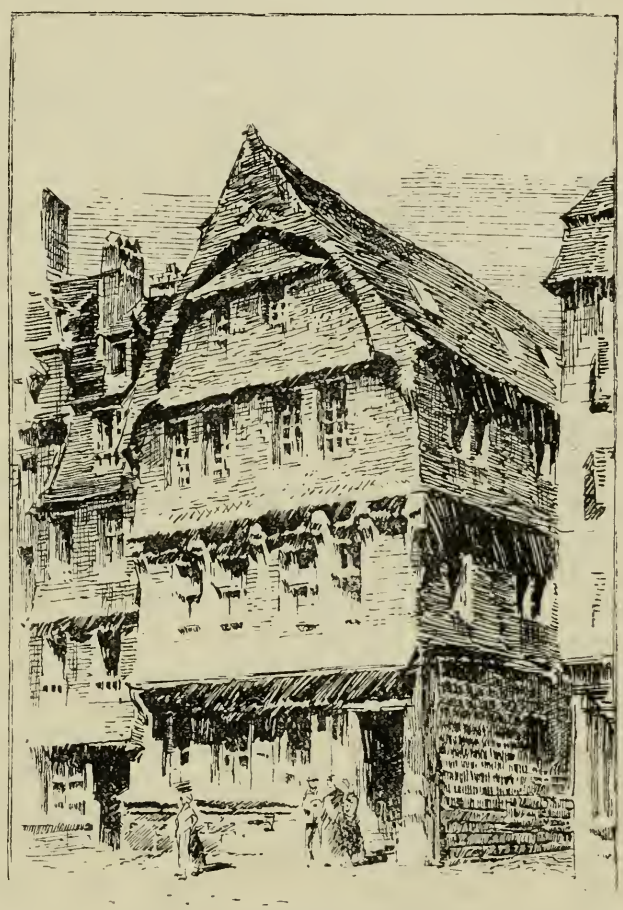
We confessed our ignorance of the ballad.

"Then," pursued Madame, with the air of a professor delivering a lecture, "you call your umbrella a *gamp* in England, n'est-ce-pas? and many people think it is taken from a celebrated character in one of your English novels. Not at all: it is merely the last syllable of our town, thus applied because the material with which the umbrella is made first came from Guin*gamp*."

"You should come to England," said H. C., "and give us a lectur

upon philology, umbrellas, and general antiquities. You would have crowded audiences."

"Monsieur is laughing at me," laughed Madame in her turn. "But what were we talking about? The Abbey of Sainte-Croix, I think. Well, *our* Abbey of Sainte-Croix has been turned into a farm; pure sacrilege; and you have to pass through the farm-yard to reach the church. An artist, who was staying here for a month last year, told me so much about the architecture that I became quite as learned in that as in umbrellas. The principal gateway is fifteenth century. It has two doorways, and over the smaller is a long inscription, containing the whole of a letter of safeguard given by Louis XV. in 1736. The transept and choir of the church are earliest Gothic. The manor house belonging to the Abbey was built by Pierre de Kernéneroy, who was Abbot in 1530. I have seen it so often that I know every moss-grown stone by heart. It has a lovely hexagonal tower surmounted by a conical roof. Nothing can be more picturesque."



OLD HOUSES, GUINGAMP.

"Madame is quite an antiquarian as well as a philologist," said H. C.

"I have always loved the antiquities," said Madame modestly. I even went so far as to vow I would marry a grey-headed octogenarian, who would always put me in mind of grand ruins; by which means I should be always in contemplation of the sublime; but when my husband proposed, with his fine black hair and dark eyes, somehow I forgot my vow until it was too late to draw back. I had promised, and a positive promise is more binding than a sentimental idea."

At this moment Monsieur happened to come in and saluted us.

The "fine black hair" was now streaked with many a silver thread, but otherwise there was nothing typical of a grand ruin or suggestive of the sublime about him. He was still strong, stalwart, and full of energy.

"Monsieur is asking about the excursions," she explained; "I tell him they are endless. Is it not so, cher ami?"

"The neighbourhood is undoubtedly full of interest," assented Monsieur. "There is Sainte-Croix——"

"I have described Sainte-Croix," interrupted Madame.

"Then there is Grâces," proceeded Monsieur, "with its interesting chapel, built in 1507 by Guy de Bretagne, in the florid Gothic style. Close by are the interesting châteaux of Kerurien and Kéribot, belonging to Monsieur de Saint-Maur; and the château of Kerano, once inhabited by James II., of England. There is the Château de Carnabat, with its galleries of portraits, very effective if not exactly chefs-d'œuvre. There is Toul-Goulic with its enormous rocks, one of the curiosities of Brittany. The river, which is full of fish, disappears here for about five hundred yards, and then reappears to continue its course to the sea."

"And then the north coast," cried Madame, who evidently thought it time to resume the parable on her own account. "We are quite accessible to the north coast, as you know: to Saint Brieuc, and to Paimpol, with its little harbour and its lovely sea. But we should weary you with a description of all our excursions: they must be made, and seen, not described."

We felt this ourselves. The most vivid portraiture must fall short of reality; and as by this time H. C. had carefully plucked and disposed of his artichoke, leaf by leaf, and our repast was at an end, Madame was released from the self-imposed duty of attending upon us. Monsieur marshalled us into the courtyard, where he declared that coffee had long been waiting—such coffee as Brittany could not rival. The place was deserted: the House had broken up; Conservatives and Radicals had paired out; each no doubt going his separate way. But as we sat down, half-a-dozen of the military element appeared, with clanking swords and full dress uniforms; turned in to refresh themselves with sirop and eau sucrée and petits verres, according to fancy. Down they sat, giving us a military salute, and entering into very animated conversation; anxious to learn our impressions of Brittany—of which as yet we knew so little, though that little was full of promise.

The next morning we saw some of them marching through the town with a regiment of Breton soldiers. We were standing at the moment at the door of a photograph shop, and the little owner had been greatly entertaining us by his quaint conversation and original views of life.

"Those are the men to fight!" he exclaimed, as the regiment trooped past with measured tread. "They are hard as nails and

will live upon a crust of bread. Nothing daunts them or turns them; on the battle field they are like tigers. France has more than once owed her safety to the Breton soldiers. They are loyal and patriotic—but specimens."

They were indeed. Short, clumsy, with faces typical of the lowest origin, shabby, ill-fitting clothes, they, for the most part, looked as our ancient Britons may have looked in the earlier centuries, when they dwelt in huts in the backwoods of their little island. And these men must have possessed very much of the same instinctive courage, the same indifference to life. Many faces there were which showed something higher and better, but we have described the prevailing type.

They all passed away, and the people at their shop-doors went back to their work refreshed by the little excitement. In front of us was the interesting church, with its fine portal, its massive towers and tall spire. Just below us the Place opened out and the water was plashing with a cool sound from basin to basin. The quaint old houses with their gables and turrets and dormer windows seemed to have put on youth with the morning sunlight. Everything was fair and promising and full of peace; the regiment was only an emblem of war, and chiefly served to awaken in one a wish for that day to come when wars shall cease. We turned down the narrow by-way leading to the mill and the fair open prospect. Everything was bright and sparkling. "The world grows younger every day" seemed the message of the wind as it rustled past us on its way up to those lofty church towers. The miller's head at this moment appeared at one of his windows. He gave us a friendly nod, which seemed to claim us for old acquaintances.

"You are enjoying the blue sky," said he. "The stars are still there, though we don't see them. That is where I place my faith and look for my miracles! I hope you have made up your minds to come to our next Pardon," he cried. "It is well worth the trouble, and I should like to be your guide. I would have an extra feu de joie lighted for you, and the National dances should never flag. Ah, messieurs, think it well over! And now for work!"

He raised his white cap and disappeared. In another moment the water flowed and the wheel creaked and turned, and immediately within the mill there was a noise as of subterranean demons at play. The good mill was grinding the corn for the town and was evidently not of the opinion that silence is golden.

And we also went our way, rejoicing in all the freshness and beauty that surrounded us; charms which give to life so much of its possibilities for happiness.

# A TALE OF CARRARA.

## I.

CARRARA. A mass of houses, little, big, old, new, white, pink, grey, all flung down with little or no attention to symmetry upon the banks of a stream whose waters are yellow when they are not black; a church spire here and there; crooked streets now and again opening into an irregular Piazza, mournfully overlooked by a dilapidated statue; a garden at intervals, over whose grey, crumbling wall the orange shows its boughs, and the Spanish jessamine drops her blossoms upon the head of the passer-by; wine shops everywhere; the click of hammers from the innumerable studios ever on the ear; a slough of mud in rainy weather, a Sahara of blinding white dust in dry; a general air of busy occupation, most unusual in Italian towns; a good deal of drunkenness, unlimited swearing, an occasional brawl, much kind-heartedness—such are the chief characteristics of the place.

The scene around, however, is such as amply makes up for any urban deficiencies.

On the immediate North the mountains loom directly over the town. Bold, fantastic peaks shooting up into the sky overhead, their flanks scarred and seamed here and there with snowy rifts that gleam and glint in the sunshine—rifts scratched by the puny hand of man, and which are the quarries familiar by name to the entire world. They resemble in their brilliancy torrents of falling water which some enchanter's hand has suddenly turned to stone.

East and West, undulating hills, rich in chestnut woods, olive groves and vineyards, with habitations peering forth from the foliage here and again.

South, the gradually sinking plain, with its waving cornfields and countless homesteads, ever sinking, sinking, till it reaches the blue sea, and mirrors its fringe of feathery verdure in the azure of the placid waters.

Lilian was sitting upon her favourite grassy bank under the boughs of the broad-leaved chestnut, the town stretching below at her feet, the silence around her broken by nothing more molesting than the hum of insect life or the faint sound of the quarryman's song as he trudged homeward from his labour.

Lower and lower sank the sun, until its rays resembled sheaves of golden arrows sped to earth in token of friendly farewell.

From vale and hollow the dark shadows began to steal forth, while a sudden coolness floated upwards; the gurgling trill of the nightingale broke softly from the wreathing vines, to be answered by the farewell of the blackbird, as he retired to rest in his thicket of myrtle and arbutus.

Orchises, from pale yellow to proud purple, growing thickly around the bank on which the girl was sitting, raised their heads with renewed life as the heat of the long and cloudless June day yielded to the approach of night, while a huge campanula nodded from its perch upon a hoary crag, shaking its bells as if in response to the deep chime of the Cathedral floating up from below.

Bat and beetle came forth, the one skimming noiselessly as a thief through the gathering gloom, the other droning around in eccentric circles. The stars, too, stole forth to shimmer in the blue and amber immensity overhead.

Louder and louder trilled the nightingale, her ecstasy swelling as the darkness fell. Earth and air were rapidly veiling themselves for slumber.

A firefly flashes forth, and as suddenly vanishes. Then another, and another — two—three—a score—hundreds—till, breaking in thousands upon the darkness, they dance in fiery phalanx. Now sinking low upon the dewy grass, now rising high amid the dark boughs overhead; never halting, ever flying, threading their weird maze, gleaming as if to mock the summer lightning playing upon the sea-bound horizon. Beating like a pulse of fire—flashing, falling, wreathing, rising; here a sheet of flame, there a starry canopy; now a glittering serpent writhing amid the dusky olives; now a flood of gems shimmering across the flower-sprent meadow—floating, soaring, sinking, spreading, till, after having enveloped Lilian for one short moment in a farewell blaze of emerald light, the joyous band flitted onwards, to be suddenly extinguished in the deep recesses of the neighbouring wood.

## II.

The second floor of No. 4, Piazza del Duomo. A house with much of the discomfort, all the ugliness, and none of the quaintness of antiquity. A house with rows of small, shallow windows, unadorned with either cornice or frieze, but, in compensation, much yellow stucco and the greenest of venetian shutters: a house altogether so modern-looking that, were it not for the marble tablet over the doorway stating that "here Michael Angelo resided during his two sojourns in Carrara," you could have set it down as the brick and mortar dream of some retired cheesemonger of fifty years ago. Retired cheesemongers of to-day would never have rested satisfied with the plain ugliness of No. 4.

Floor No. 2 had been let furnished to an elderly Irish gentleman and his wife—Mr. and Mrs. O'Connell—childless, and free of incumbrance save their own tempers, a lady companion to Madame, and a negro girl in common to both—a negro girl who, in a fit of Irish expansion, had been adopted by them, and whom tardy repentance condemned to wash up the dishes and make the beds.

The O'Connells had lived for some time somewhere in Western

Africa, where Mr. O'Connell had filled an insignificant government post from which his temper had finally ousted him; and it was during their sojourn there that "Fanny," the black girl, had been taken in hand.

The "rooms" like the majority of Italian furnished apartments, contained nothing more than what was barely necessary: and the landlord had known to a nicety how to combine the minimum of chattels with the maximum of charges. In a word, he had fully adopted the plan of all letters of lodgings here, from Milan to Messina.

However, neither Mr. O'Connell nor his better half—she was this in every sense of the word — made any complaint, though the floors were of brick and carpetless, the kitchen smoky, and the crockery so scant as to necessitate, at times, a pie-dish doing duty for a washbasin. They might almost be said to relish, rather than resent, similar disorder, for it doubtless gave a picnic sort of illusion to life: and as they had already passed so many years of their lives in wandering over the globe without having a fixed home anywhere upon its surface, this latter, in its real sense, had become a superfluous possession. It is quite possible that a comfortable house would have proved irksome to them.

He was literary, she devotional, both untidy, to say the least of it. And between the old gentleman's unpleasant temper, the lady's yet more irritating passiveness, the black girl's slatternly vanity and the general discomfort and discord of house and keeping, it may well be supposed that Lilian Leslie's lot was by no means to be envied.

She was an orphan, with nothing in the world to depend upon, save her own exertions and a sum of twelve hundred pounds left her by her godmother. Her parents had been gentlefolk born. Her mother, unhappily, had died early—her father, unhappily, had died late—no time being thus afforded the former to prepare her child for the battle of life, while ample leisure was left the latter to squander away selfishly, even to the last penny, a comfortable, if not a handsome, fortune.

The whole little history, in fact, was but one of the thousands daily evolving around us, and all tending to show what a strange mystery our earthly life really is, and how impossible it is for us to fathom its depths or purpose. We can only regard it as a trial to our faith in God, an invitation to trust in His goodness and foresight, and an earnest of a better life hereafter.

As has been said, the O'Connells had passed a part of their lives in Africa, amid Krumen and Crocodiles, and there were times when they seemed unable or unwilling to forget it. Especially Mr. O'Connell; he was somewhat too prone to take white men for black, and treat them accordingly.

Fanny, when quite a baby, had been found under a palm tree after a general massacre of all her people, and instead of furnishing

some wandering lion's supper, had been brought to the O'Connells, and had been baptized in the Roman Catholic Faith.

The O'Connells were of that persuasion; or rather, she was; for Mr. O'Connell did not seem to have faith in anything particular, save in his own dear self, nor any religion except his own comfort. He was a feeble dabbler, too, in science, and like many of his brethren, found it much more easy to deny than accept what he could not define.

On the return of the elderly couple to Europe, about eighteen months previous to the opening of our tale, a "mutual friend," who, for lack of occupation and amusement, had taken to doing a sort of amateur registry office business, had installed Lilian Leslie in the position of "dame de compagnie" to Mrs. O'Connell, at a salary of £25 per annum, everything found; an unlimited opportunity for the exercise of patient endurance also generously provided gratis.

Fanny had just carried in the lamp, and was making vain efforts to light it at a side-table, preparatory to bringing in tea.

One match after another grates upon the box and, apparently, upon Mr. O'Connell's nerves as well, for he looks up from the writing-table at which he is seated, the light of two candles making his bald old head gleam out from between them like a ball of ancient ivory, glares across the room at his adopted daughter and breaks forth:

"What the deuce are you scraping at there? Don't you see that I am writing?"

Fanny grinned across in reply, and gave a fresh scrape, as if to score a note of admiration in her patron's honour.

Mrs. O'Connell moved uneasily in her armchair, and said in her usual limp tone: "I beg of ye, Thomas, dear, now don't use that dreadful word. Don't ye know——"

"No, I *don't* know, nor do I wish to know anything but that I am writing, and that you two women are disturbing me. There, another match! That's the seventh. Pray, do you suppose that matches don't cost money?"

"Of course, they do, Thomas. But the matches here are so bad, their heads are always flying off. I suppose it's the damp."

She rose, with a resigned sigh, and crossed slowly over to Fanny's assistance.

"Why, there's no oil, you silly child. Of course it can't light. And the wick is all cauliflowered. You should be more careful, my child, you should indeed."

"Well, I fill him and trim him last Sursday, and to-day's ony Sunday."

"Well, never mind now; take it into the kitchen, my child, we'll settle it up there."

Leaving her husband to growl at his leisure over his women and his woes, Mrs. O'Connell followed her black handmaid.

As the door closed behind the retreating petticoats, the lamp of science which old O'Connell fondly believed to exist within his head seemed to flash forth with redoubled radiance, and fling its light across every feature.

He was engaged upon a work to be entitled "Sunny Italy," a book that will, doubtless, cause a sensation on publication, of one kind or another, and which can scarcely help impressing its readers, owing to the fact of the author being as ignorant of the language as he is of the geography of the country he has undertaken to describe.

When Lilian entered, the elderly couple were already seated at tea. The gentleman vouchsafed neither glance nor greeting, only continued to munch, in utter unconcern—the click, click, click, of his all-too-fine set of false teeth playing a cheerful castanet-like accompaniment. The lady, however, smiled feebly, and in her usual spiritless voice, enquired where Lilian had been.

"Up to old Forti's vineyard, as usual," replied Lilian, seating herself; "the night is perfectly lovely."

"Isn't it rather late for you to be out, my child?"

(Mrs. O'Connell would have my-childed Queen Victoria herself, had the occasion offered itself.)

"Well, it *is* rather late, perhaps. But it is so very near, you know, and Car—old Forti's son, I mean—saw me home. He's in the kitchen now, waiting to see Mr. O'Connell about to-morrow's excursion."

Here a peal of laughter penetrated from that department to the parlour, and clearly showed that Carlo, at any rate, was not losing his time, whatever his sable companion might be doing.

A volley of clicks, terminating in a gulp, betokened Mr. O'Connell's attention being at last aroused.

"Have him in, by all means," he said. "The grotto I am about to visit to-morrow—to say nothing of the quarries—will form the subject for an important chapter in my work. Yes, have him in by all means."

Here he settled himself with becoming dignity in his chair, while Lilian rose to summon the farmer's son to the august presence.

"Good evening, signor," said Mr. O'Connell upon Carlo's entry; pointing at the same time to a chair with what might be supposed to be a monarch's condescending suavity to an ambassador of whose political bias he was, as yet, not quite certain.

Mr. O'Connell "signored" the very street-sweepers—with the same species of sincerity implied by the epistolary "obedient servant."

Then, laying aside the grand, condescending tone and taking up the usual domestic tartness, he said to Lilian: "Now, mind you interpret correctly. Yours is a responsible office, and I hope you are by this time aware of its importance."

If not quite alive to its weight, she was, at least, keenly so to its weariness. But she betrayed neither her ignorance nor her distaste:

only nodded cheerfully, smiled brightly across the table to Carlo, and prepared to do her best for both master and man.

"You are the son of the Signor Forti from whom Mrs. O'Connell purchases fruit and farm produce for my household, are you not?"

The question, duly interpreted, was speedily answered in the affirmative.

"Has your name any particular origin. Forty in Italian means strong in English."

This important information was addressed to his wife, who nodded limply in reply.

"Had you ancestors, I mean: ancestors who distinguished themselves in any way by their prowess? I am writing a most important work upon Italy, and—Mary, give Signor Forti a cup of tea."

But, with a smile, Carlo disclaimed all knowledge of predatory forefathers, and declined the proffered tea with thanks. He had tried it already on a former occasion, and had afterwards described it to his father as a decoction of hay.

"Are you well acquainted with this grotto? Quite able to act as my guide?"

"Si, signor."

"Is there no danger?" murmured Mrs. O'Connell. "Ask him, Lilian, my child, if there is no danger."

Yes, there was a certain amount of danger, but none that could not be obviated by common prudence.

Mrs. O'Connell's cheek grew, if possible, a shade paler, and her eyes closed in helpless dismay while Lilian translated the young man's sketch of the labyrinth of rushing waters, arching halls and never ending passages that combine to form the "Grotto del Tannone." She shuddered openly at the conclusion: "Professor Spalanzani groped his way onwards for over seven hours without reaching the end."

"Now, don't make yourself ridiculous, Mary. If there is any danger, I shall be there to see you through it."

Mr. O'Connell's utterance and gesture reminded Lilian of Napoleon I. She did not say so, however.

"Mary" sighed wearily. She knew from experience how utterly useless any wish or word of hers would prove to bring about relinquishment of the proposed exploration. Her Thomas was as obstinate as he was selfish, and always insisted upon her accompanying him everywhere. But more than this: she would not have suffered him to go alone, even had he proposed it. She really loved the man with all the strength of her feeble heart and foolish head.

In the hope of finding some sort of comfort, at least, she drained the teapot of its last drop: and then, not being satisfied with the result, lay back in her chair and, swaying gently to and fro, and with closed eyes, commenced making mental appeal to every saint

in the calendar to improvise some effectual means of keeping them all out of the wretched grotto.

Carlo's rising brought her to with a start: she descended limply from the mystic heights in which she had been soaring and was on earth once more. Alas! All had been satisfactorily settled, and an early departure fixed.

"But, is there no danger of being lost in that dreadful place?" moaned the poor woman.

"Trust to me for that," replied Carlo, with a smile that betrayed no small share of confidence in his own stalwart self.

It awakened none in poor Mrs. O'Connell, however. Mr. O'Connell had already too much of his own to require that of anyone else.

Lilian alone felt its influence. Her cheek flushed and her eyes brightened in the anticipation of the excursion. There was danger to awaken a pleasant excitement—the sense of being about to be dependant for protection and guidance (a sense dear to all true women) upon a magnificent specimen of the sterner sex; the knowledge of being about to see something she had never seen before and, perhaps, a host of other sentiments that we will not for the present enquire into.

She felt herself a very happy girl as she lighted the young farmer to the door and wished him a hearty good-night.

## III.

THE sun was bright and the sky blue; the hills gleaming in their morning freshness, the mountains veiling their majesty as yet in a purple haze. In fact, the saints had behaved shabbily to poor Mrs. O'Connell on this, as on many another occasion. The day was as fair a one as any could wish to see, no token of either earthquake or flood, or of any other especial cataclysm such as the poor woman had, in the secret depths of her weary heart, half dared to desire.

All was bright and balmy as the little party, headed, of course, by Mr. O'Connell, crossed the threshold of No. 4 and stepped out upon the Piazza. There stood, or leant, or sat, a whole group of ragged urchins, collected to witness the departure of "gli Inglesi" for the grotto.

Big and burly, clad in imposing tourist costume, carrying his biggest umbrella, Mr. O'Connell stepped out of the doorway to be greeted with a suppressed murmur of admiration by the assembled street arabs. Mrs. O'Connell, clad in her usual shabby black merino embroidered down the front with seedy red convolvulus in crashwork —her own performance—followed: she bore a big black bag on one arm, a sunshade in one hand, and a campstool and an unpleasant-looking circular air cushion in the other. *Her* advent, however, was hailed with tokens of respect and sympathy. For many a soldo

had her pale thin fingers slipped into the hand of the mendicant—and mendicants swarm in Carrara—and her pale face and weak voice had finished by conquering the sympathy of the entire population of the place.

A little ragged fellow came forward from among his scarcely less picturesque companions, and, sliding up to her, gazed mutely up into her face with the deprecating, trusting expression of a dumb animal seeking relief and sympathy.

"Toto, my child, how is your mother?" asked Mrs. O'Connell, as she stopped to lay her long, thin hand upon the boy's elfin locks.

"Pretty well, signora, thank you."

"And your father? You have heard nothing of him?"

These words were uttered in all but a whisper.

The child silently shook his head, and the bright tears gathered in his black eyes and commenced rolling down his grimy cheeks.

"God help you, my poor child," murmured Mrs. O'Connell.

Then a loud, deep voice arose with: "Well, do you suppose I am going to stand here the whole morning? I——"

Mrs. O'Connell hastily slipped a coin into the child's hand, gave him a kindly nod, and hurried to rejoin her husband.

Next came Lilian, in a pale blue cotton dress and a wide straw hat, forming a pretty and pleasant contrast to Fanny, who followed closely in spotted gown, black hat and feather with scarlet poppies, a red cravat, her whole person simmering in satisfaction and sunshine.

"La Negra, la Negra," broke from the little crowd as she appeared, and, as usual, the whole troop gathered at her heels. One, however, who ventured somewhat too close to the object of his wonderment, received a cuff from Carlo which sent him staggering back, and effectually cleared the way by creating a diversion: and availing themselves of this, our party turned down the Via Ghibellina and, crossing the "Ponte delle lagrime," entered the dusty Carriona Road.

## IV.

"Now, Miss Leslie, mind you keep close to me," said Mr. O'Connell, when they were fairly out of the town, and found themselves upon the picturesque road leading to Torano, "keep close to me, and be sure you translate Signor Forty's words correctly."

Carlo seemed to catch the old gentleman's meaning, for, with a cheery, intelligent nod, he drew a step nearer to both. A bright smile broke over his bronzed features, and his eyes flashed with a new light as they rested for a moment upon Lilian's fair features.

Carlo Forti was one of those who smile with eyes and soul, not with lip alone, as is all too common nowadays. He was one, too, upon whom the women turned to gaze—lithe, yet stalwart in form, and with a head such as a sculptor loves to model. Well-to-do in the world, too: an only son, and heir to as nice a bit of property as

one could wish to see. Olive woods and a vineyard overhanging Carrara, with a snug home peering out from a knot of chestnut trees as if to gaze forth upon the far-lying sea, to say nothing of a tidy sum of money deposited in the National Bank.

Mrs. O'Connell bought her butter and bacon of old Forti, and you would not have given a franc for the coat he wore; he would haggle over a half-penny, and was somewhat rough in manner and loud in voice. Yet, for all this, he was a good man at heart, had been a faithful husband to his dead wife, loved his strapping son with all the strength of his old soul, and was always glad to see him cut a good figure, though he could never persuade him to stick a carnation behind his ear on holidays, as is the fashion of the youths and maidens in these parts.

It was no mercenary motive that had induced Carlo to undertake the task of guide on the present occasion. He had, with the tact common to all Italians, early taken in the whole state of affairs in the O'Connell household, and his pity for the pale, elderly lady and the bright, fresh young girl was boundless.

He determined to do all in his power to mitigate their cheerless lot, and if there lurked some more selfish motive at the bottom of it all, it is neither you nor I, dear reader, that can fairly trace the source of our best actions without finding some smirch of egotism at their root. Suffering of any description was the key to Carlo's heart, and if the violet eyes of the English maiden had had their influence upon him, let it not be charged to his discredit.

"Of course, thou wilt be paid for thy troubles," old Forti had whispered into his son's ear at his starting.

"Of course, I shall be paid," replied Carlo, with a laugh, as he bounded down the steep. And as he laughed, the vision of the violet eyes rose before him in a manner so as to be already a payment in itself. His idea of payment was not that of the old man.

Mrs. O'Connell, bag, campstool and cushion (Carlo had, in vain, tried to relieve her of them), was, as usual, lagging a dozen paces behind, and was only kept moving at all by a periodic administration of unpleasantly energetic words from her husband. "Now, Mary, do come on, will you," or, "Now, Mary, I won't have you lagging in that way. I'm not going to be broiled to accommodate your laziness."

The words look innocent enough—their tone was everything. He never stopped to utter them—only turned half round and launched the dart, with a "click, click" of his beautiful teeth, like the disagreeable old Parthian that he was. The moral pick-me-up never failed in its effect upon the poor lady, while no word of complaint ever passed her lips.

Carlo, on his part, more than once devoutly wished the old tyrant would stumble, as he turned to discharge his arrow, and fall nto the stream, along whose banks they were proceeding.

Fanny, who, by the way, was much more attached to her self-loving master than to her self-sacrificing mistress, but impatiently adapted her own sturdy pace to the poor lady's languid one; her short, dry words, her eyes ever fixed in the one direction, her irritated manner plainly showed how much she would have preferred marching along merrily by Carlo's side.

They wound along upon the banks of the rushing rivulet, richly wooded heights rising on either side, grey rocks alternating with the freshest verdure: tufts of brilliant flowers waving from pinnacled cliff, or from crumbling wall-patches of velvetty moss, contrasting richly with the sepia-tinted rock cropping up in their midst; beds of fern still pearled over by the late-lying dew and gleaming up from every hollow, like a scrap of fairyland fallen to earth. A wilderness of olive and chestnut, with, here and there, a farmhouse peeping forth from its wreathes of vine. Now a copse of myrtle and arbutus; again, a ruin all ablaze with flaunting snapdragons. The air fresh and balmy with the breath of honeysuckle and wild rose; the feathery pines, with which the lofty ridges were crowned, standing out soft and clear against the cloudless sky. The whole pervaded by that inexplicable something that heralds approach to the savage majesty of mountain scenery.

All was fair to look upon, pleasant to listen to on that bright June morning, and our party trudged onwards through the white dust in tolerable enjoyment and comfort.

Under the shadow of a red, overhanging rock, from beneath which gushed a tiny spring, Mr. O'Connell halted, drew out a notebook from one of his many pockets, and, after looking around him for a moment in impressive solemnity, entered the following:

"One of the most striking features of the scenery around Carrara is the strange mingling of the richest vegetation with the most sterile aridity. It is my opinion ——"

But you will read his book, and there learn what his opinion is, so we will only add that his observation is a true one.

The picturesque little town of Torano, nestling between its double chain of wooded hills at the very foot of a frowning mountain, all seared and seamed with blasting, was soon reached, and our party, previous to exploring the cavern, at once proceeded to visit the quarries in the immediate vicinity. Such had been the ukase issued by Mr. O'Connell, in utter disregard to anyone's convenience save his own.

The word quarry, in its usual sense, gives no sort of idea of what a Carrara "Cava" really is. It is no excavation, more or less deep, nor is it a tunnel of any description. A Carrara quarry lies open to the dew and sunshine of heaven and stretches down the mountain flank like a frozen torrent, making you blink again. A seam on the face of the cliff—a scratch made by man's puny hand on the grand face of nature.

At the foot of one of the nearest quarries our party halted. Here Carlo established Mrs. O'Connell, bag, cushion and all, in a comfortable nook, formed by three enormous blocks of marble, lying ready for transport. The poor woman looked her gratitude, for, what with the dust and the heat, she was unable to speak. So there she silently enthroned herself, looking like a dark-robed saint in a niche, with her pale blue eyes fixed in weak wonderment at the long, glittering quarry that ran up the mountain side immediately before her, and whispering to herself that it resembled nothing so much as a gigantic winding-sheet.

It very likely was the winding-sheet of some poor quarryman or other.

Lilian would gladly have taken a seat beside her, but Mr. O'Connell insisted upon her going on with him some paces further to translate Carlo's information for the benefit of his "Sunny Italy."

Fanny flitted from one to the other, a startling contrast to the dazzling white all around: her black skin, wonderful dress, broad smile and flirty manner, succeeding fully in attracting the attention of every quarryman within reach, all of whom ceased their labour to gaze, grin and exchange remarks, which it would be imprudent to note.

From time to time the long-drawn notes of the horn of warning echoed from the heights above, giving notice of the firing of a mine. Then, on looking upwards, the workmen, reduced by distance and contrast to mere pigmies, were to be seen hurry-skurrying to a place of safety—comparative safety, at least—amid the adjacent rocks. A moment or two of expectant stillness. Then a sudden roar.

An enormous mass vibrates overhead, trembles on the verge of the precipice, shivers as if in terror at the void into which it is about to launch itself. It sways forwards, turns slowly over, and then with a bound leaps into space, crashing down the steep with the roar of thunder, and scattering right and left on its frantic path showers of deadly fragments of snowy marble that gleam and glitter in the sunshine like hail, and each stone of which carries death on its range.

With a sudden shock, and, at most, a dull bound, the falling mass is brought to a standstill by some rocky impediment and lies grovelling there in ignoble defeat.

The dust has floated away, the workmen have crept from their refuges, the ring of pick and crow is heard once more, snatches of song float up on the still, warm air: man's restless activity resumes full sway. And so on till again the horn sends forth its warning that the wings of death are about to be unfurled anew over their heads. Nor death alone—but what is, in most cases worse, mutilation; meaning here starvation and beggary for life.

And scarcely a week passes that is not marked by the loss of some limb or life. The stony stare of the mountain face relaxes not—it heeds not the human emmets that swarm over it, creeping and

limbing to assault its breast: care not that the labourer's morning iss to wife and child is to be his last upon earth—that he who limbed the heights in all the strength and vigour of manhood be arried down before eve by a band of silent companions.

Is it, perhaps, a merciful dispensation that all the human race are rone to think of death for others, but rarely for themselves?

A volley of whoops and howls, such as warring Indians and vrathful Irish are said to give tongue to, suddenly breaks forth from ehind the ridge of rocks round which the dusty road winds. Mr. O'Connell starts, snaps the point of his pencil, peers over his glasses or a second, and, the hubbub increasing, looks anxiously around him or a place of safety.

A cloud of white suffocating dust veils even the near rocks themelves from view. And like lightning from a thunder-cloud, volleys f oaths flash out from the surging dust—something terrible is vidently approaching. Poor Mr. O'Connell remains for a moment aralyzed, then turns to flee. With an agility for which none would ave given his elephantine form credit, he scrambles to the top of a ear block and turns to gaze from his refuge upon the turmoil below. He, too, looks like an elderly effigy.

Mrs. O'Connell, half dead with terror, could only squeeze herself ack to the very end of her niche, and there, with closed eyes, await what she supposed was to be her last hour.

Then forth from the ever-nearing cloud of swirling dust looms igly one pair of wide horns after another—then follow the whiteided, dark-eyed oxen, their brown ears flapping. One pair after nother, every second couple with an elf-locked lad perched between he horns and sitting face to tail, brandishing a club and joining his hrill voice to the infernal chorus emanating from a rabble of halflad men who, brandishing long goads, execute a species of devils' ance along the entire length of the cavalcade, rushing hither and hither, shrieking, cursing, gesticulating as if possessed, yelling as if or life—the whole scene a very pandemonium of din and dust, confusion, dirt and noise.

On they come. Past Mr. O'Connell, statue-like upon his perch, floundering forward over the dusty road; past pale Lilian whom Carlo had gently drawn aside to a place of safety; past the excited Fanny, who would persist in clinging closely to Carlo's arm with the pertinacity of a horse-leech—past Mrs. O'Connell, who sat in her niche and gazed forth upon the lumbering train with the expression of a saint gazing upon a revelation of the inferno—on—on—on, till, at last, behind the long train of oxen emerged from its cloud of dust a long, low truck, framed of poles and four wheels like huge cheeses, and upon which lay a block of glittering marble, destined for the hands of the sculptor, or doomed to the teeth of the sawmill.

V.

MORNING wore on, and as the sun rose higher and higher, the refreshing air died away, and a breathless, fiery haze spread itself, like a scorching veil, over the face of the earth.

Above the bold crests of the mountains, rolls of snowy cloud began to show—rising stealthily as if to peer down into the valleys below—surging silently up from unseen depths beyond, and standing out in dazzling relief against the deep azure.

Mrs. O'Connell, in her own meek mind, likened them to gigantic piles of cotton wool; and, after all, her simile was not a bad one.

Mr. O'Connell called it a cumulus, and forthwith improvised a lecture which might have proved interesting to any one able to understand it.

Carlo gazed thoughtfully at the ever-rising mass, scanned the horizon with searching eye, and then, in somewhat embarrassed manner, addressed himself to Lilian:

"Signorina, do you see those clouds yonder? They bode a storm, and a heavy one. Will you kindly tell the Signore there that perhaps it will be better to put off visiting the grotto till another day?"

Lilian obeyed.

"Not visit the grotto to-day? Stuff and nonsense. The storm is not coming here—it's all on the other side of the mountains. And even if it did, what matter? I wish it would—it would give me matter for a fine description. No, no. I have made up my mind to see the cavern to-day, and go I will. Now, Mary, it's time to be marching. Come."

They set off, retracing their steps towards Torano all through the breathless heat and over the dusty road. No wild bird's note was now to be heard. Nothing but the dull thud of their own feet in the thick white dust. Not an insect seemed to move—nothing gave token of life save the snowy mass of cloud ever rising in noiseless billows.

On reaching the low doorway of the cavern, Carlo halted for a moment to give a last look without.

The cloudy mass had lost much of its whiteness—it was now varied with every tint of grey. Only its extreme edges gleamed yet with the snowy purity of its primitive hue. It was now resting, so to say, on the crest of the mountain range, frowning down into the valley below, and with an army of followers surging silently up from behind it, rank after rank, like warriors ranging themselves in battle array.

A sharp word from Mr. O'Connell made Carlo turn. With a slight shrug of his shoulders which might mean everything or nothing, he obeyed his patron's sign and entered the narrow passage-way that leads to the mysterious grotto.

The party followed.

"What is it you fear?" whispered Lilian to Carlo, as he halted

just within the entrance to light one of the bundle of torches that had been provided.

"Nothing worse than a good wetting," he replied, smiling. "When a storm comes down over the mountain in that fashion, it brings with it water enough to flood the whole valley for a bit. But no matter; you see the old gentleman will have it; and, after all, we shall always have a roof over our heads."

This was literally true, though not in the usual sense of the word. They had reached the first of the endless chain of halls, and high over their heads hung the arched vault, looming down in grand gloom, and hardly distinguishable by the light of their torches. Huge stalactites gleamed ghastly and spectre-like out from the darkness around.

The air was cold and damp, and the sound of rushing waters surged up from beneath their feet, telling of menacing depths below. Heavy drops, too, filtering from the roof, fell upon the limestone floor with a tinkling sound which, in warmth and sunshine, would have been pleasant enough, but which, amid the darkness there, awakened nothing but a start and a shiver.

One big icy drop splashed unexpectedly down upon poor Mrs. O'Connell's neck, causing a suppressed scream, which, echoing through the endless corridors and chambers, took up the proportions of a very demon chorus. A rough remark as to her always putting herself in the wrong place, was all the consolation she got from her husband.

"Thanks ever so much, my child," she murmured to Lilian, who helped to draw the flimsy black scarf she was wearing closer around her throat; "that will do nicely." Then, with a half repressed shudder, she once more followed her ponderous husband's unhesitating steps.

"This is grand! grand!! grand!!!" pronounced Mr. O'Connell approvingly, as he halted beneath a dome of fretted stone to knot a silk handkerchief about his neck. "Grand! I say, grand!!" And then he gazed slowly around him, as if in expectation of the genius of the place coming forward to give thanks for his good will and approval.

But the echoes of his own words was all he got, and they, too, died away, leaving the tinkling treble to join in once more with the deep bass droning up from the unseen depths beyond.

Behind them the low, narrow entrance, outside of which the sunlight possibly lay bright and cheery; before them, unknown miles of gloom and grimness—a very sea of darkness—stretching within a labyrinth of corridors and chambers.

Yet on they went, slowly and with uncertainty, with hushed voices and furtive glances around.

Each, too, with their own particular feeling. Mr. O'Connell's that of egotistical triumph; his wife's that of unmitigated dismay; Lilian's one of pleasant excitement.

We will say nothing about Carlo's feelings—they can be guessed at.

On, on, on, the red glare of the torches paling, the flame shrinking as the atmosphere around grew dense and denser.

And meanwhile, without the cavern, the sun still shone bright—but the ever-rising cloud mass swelled and billowed, threatening to blot out the entire blue from sight. Distant mutterings from time to time broke on earth's listening ear, and, now and again, the olive and poplar shivered and swayed beneath the sudden gust of cold, icy wind which now sped over the valley, as if to herald the approaching storm.

The explorers reached one of the many lakes within the hill, and halted upon its stony shore. The torches flung their wild glare over the dark waters, streaking them as if with blood. To the left, the lake stretched far back into the brooding gloom. To the right, it narrowed suddenly into a swift-flowing flood, across which a broad plank had been laid for the benefit of visitors.

The stream glided silent and swift as a serpent from its darksome dent, but only to roar and rage the more frantically, with hurried hiss and foamy flight, in its wild encounter with an endless array of bristling, broken rocks, through which it precipitated itself and among which it thundered on till swallowed by the labyrinth, into which, since the day of creation, the friendly sun had never shone.

Lilian and Fanny crossed the plank without hesitation or difficulty. Mrs. O'Connell drew back in dismay when it came to her turn.

"Now, Mary, don't make a fool of yourself," cried her husband in his biggest voice.

A thousand echoes repeated "fool, fool, fool," as if a scattered demon chorus had been lurking on high and around. This was too much for Fanny, who broke out into such a fit of laughter as to call forth a burst of goblin merriment such as probably all the jumbees of her native land would have been unable to beat. She seized Carlo's arm, as she loved to do upon the slightest occasion, and only relinquished it when the weird voices had once more died away.

Then the young man re-crossed and led over Mrs. O'Connell with as much gentle kindness as if she had been his mother.

None but Mr. O'Connell now remained.

"Are you quite sure the plank is strong and sound?"

He addressed the question to Carlo, who, guessing its import, replied by running heavily over it to the other side where the old gentleman was standing. He would have willingly helped him over as he had helped the others, but wisely judged that the irascible Irishman's weight was quite enough for the board to bear.

With much the air of an elephant cautiously feeling its way upon suspicious ground, Thomas O'Connell at last ventured himself upon the plank, advancing one substantial foot before the other only after first dabbing softly at the wood to test its solidity. Finally, however

he arrived safe and sound on the opposite side where the anxiously watching women were awaiting him.

With a bound that made Lilian's heart leap to her very throat, Carlo followed ; then they once more set forward.

Hall succeeded to hall, generally connected by a tortuous passage, so low as to compel a regular creep on hands and knees in some places. And many of these halls were ghastly in the extreme, with their enormous proportions lost in the gloom, out from which loomed on every hand white, fantastic forms—giants in stony cerements—shapes, such as one sees in prehistoric animals, barring the path with mute menace—sights, such as start into life in dream-land—sounds, undefined and undefineable. Yet, on they went—on —on—on—through the ever-thickening, never-ending gloom.

The storm-clouds without have suddenly leaped up and covered the whole heavens with a pall. As in envy of its brightness, blotting out all, and now scaling the highest heavens as with a myriad of invading foes. Then it was, as if at a given signal, the demons of destruction were let loose to wreak upon earth their wildest fury. Flash after flash, peal upon peal, scourging the upturned face of Nature with cataracts such as make each tiny rill bound forth a brawling brook, and swell the peacefully gliding stream into a roaring flood.

But, as yet, those wandering in the heart of the hill had heard nothing of the battle raging without : the thunder crashing across the vault of heaven awoke no echo in the rocky labyrinth below.

They were sitting in one of that long series of halls, nearly a mile from the entrance, fantastic forms around and above them, the dense air causing the lights to burn dim and heavy, no breath of life, or definite sound, to break the sepulchral stillness.

The provisions which, with the torches, Carlo had taken care to provide, were spread upon a mass of stone shaped like an altar ; and in a crevice of this stone the youth had managed to stick a couple of candles. The scene was a weird one. Those five persons there might have been early Christians met together for secret worship, or they might have been plotters of anarchy and crime. Old O'Connell, with his bald head and splendid white beard, could have been either an officiating priest or a conspiring leader as he stood there beside that limestone block, his dark robed wife a worshipper or a victim. In one sense of the words she was both. The rest of the party could be converts, or conspirators. The whole, however, was a study such as seldom falls to the lot of either poet or painter.

"Well, this is something worth looking at," said Mr. O'Connell, as he gazed round him with uplifted glass (the only one) filled to the brim with some of the best wine Carrara could produce ; "something well worth seeing, indeed."

For that matter he might, in his old heart, have alluded to the

liquid amber in his glass, that flashed as the dim flame of the candles fell upon it, for there was really nothing else particularly calculated to awaken admiration—little besides a centre of sickly, lurid light in a circumference of outer darkness.

"Thanks ever so much, my child," said Mrs. O'Connell, as she took the leather cup from Lilian's hand which Carlo's forethought and kindness had provided and offered.

The meal—if meal it could be called—was eaten with appetite, though despatched in silence. The solemn stillness around had fallen upon all with numbing power, and even the African girl's discordant laugh and idle chatter were for the moment hushed.

"What is that great white mass there?" asked Lilian, when the last slice of sausage and the last roll had disappeared. "There: I mean that." She pointed over to a duskily defined arch, from beneath which a huge white object gleamed faintly forth.

"That is the 'organ,'" replied Carlo: "the grotto we are now sitting in is called the 'church.' Ah, you should have seen it when it was all lighted up in honour of the Prince's visit. That was something like. An illumination a giorno. Paradise itself could not be more magnificent. It was all ——"

"What is he saying, Miss Leslie?" cried Mr. O'Connell, pricking up his ears at the word "Principe," one of the few Italian words he knew: and, at the same time, his wife's face relaxed a little as she caught the sound of "Paradiso."

(He loved a prince as an Englishman is said to love a lord. She had higher aspirations; though, at the present moment, she was somewhat in a dudgeon with her saints for their not having saved her from being led into the place in which she found herself).

"Ah, the Prince. Yes. I understand. Well, I am glad to know he has been here. I shall certainly send him my work as soon as it is published. I might even dedicate it to him—the opportunity would be a good one. Well, I shall think it over. But your comparison, Signor Forty, is all wrong: Paradise means a garden, and here there is nothing to recall anything—— "

He stopped short. A curious sort of vibration was running through the vault, causing the flame of the candles to flicker. A piece of stone fell from the roof.

"Heaven save us, what is that?" cried Mrs. O'Connell.

But ere the words were well out all was still once more; no sound struck upon their eager ears; no sight upon their questioning eyes.

"It seemed to come from there," said Lilian in a low tone, pointing towards the side by which they had entered.

"Oh, yes. He come up dat way," cried Fanny.

The words of both were addressed to Carlo.

"Oh, Thomas, dear, do let us be going; there's a dear, kind man."

"Time enough, time enough," was the reply. "Miss Leslie wants to see the organ. Nay, I know you do. There, Signor Forty, pray

do the honours of the organ to the Signorina. And mind"—this to Lilian—"mind, I say, you make good use of your eyes. You will describe it to me minutely. I feel tired myself. There; now go while I make a note or two."

He set himself to write with renewed energy, for he felt morally refreshed at having crossed his weary wife's wishes without any particular sacrifice upon his own part.

In grave silence he wrote on by the red light of the guttering candle. A confused cluster of stalactites and stalagmites of all sizes, and between which it was possible to squeeze in places; a curiously fretted roof above. Such was the object upon which common consent had bestowed the title of "organ."

Lilian and Carlo stood within the fantastic maze of white, semi-transparent pilasters, the red light of a single candle flinging a confused network of shadows around—the young man's handsome, eager face bent in undisguised admiration upon that of his companion.

Her eyes sank beneath that passionate gaze. Both were silent, though never before had either been eloquent as then, nor said to each other what that silence so plainly expressed.

He took her hand and clasped it warmly within his own. Then Lilian looked up into his face, tears were welling into her violet eyes. A tremour ran through her whole frame.

"Ti amo, Lilian, ti amo. Lo sai? Ti amo."

He drew her unresistingly to his broad breast, and, for a moment, her fair head rested there.

"Mi ami tu, pure," he whispered.

She raised her eyes to his. "Si, Carlo, io ti a ——"

The word died upon her blenching lips, for there, out from the shadow, within a group of ghostly columns immediately behind her lover, gleamed forth a pair of fierce, fiery eyes.

She could only stare back, with whitening cheek and uplifted hand. Then, before Carlo could turn to see what was thus fascinating her gaze in that strange manner, the vision was gone, and naught left save the gleam of the slender columns from the darkness behind.

## VI.

Mr. O'Connell was deep in his notes when the young people returned. His wife, her weary head resting upon the altar before her, had fallen into a troubled doze, while Fanny, pillowed upon the black bag, was crouched up at her feet, seemingly in dreamless slumber.

The two women were in semi-darkness, while the rayless light fell full upon the old man's bald head with sickly glare. His eager eye and flying fingers gave evidence of his having struck a happy train of ideas; and as the young people approached, he held up a warning finger to them enjoining silence.

Lilian had begged Carlo on no account to alarm Mrs. O'Connell by

any hint as to what she had seen, praying him only to do his best to get them all out of the place as quickly as possible.

He pressed her hand in reply. They both felt unspeakably happy, and the old despot's imposition of silence was to them a grateful one.

They seated themselves in silence, while a curious mingling of the past, present and future occupied their minds.

Then, after a while, Carlo, who like all his countrymen was a born diplomat, said to Mr. O'Connell:

"Well, signor, is not this a pleasant place? And do you not think that another hour's repose here will quite set the ladies up again?"

"Not by any means, signor. I intend starting at once. It is getting late, and I purpose being at home for dinner. Come, get your things together, all of you, and let us be off."

None needed a second bidding, and in less than five minutes everybody was ready for departure.

One by one the grottos were passed, one by one the galleries threaded. The spirits of all rose involuntarily as they approached the termination of their subterranean wanderings. Even Mrs. O'Connell's voice and gait grew less limp and languid.

Once more they neared the lake, and, that once passed, a short half hour would restore them to daylight and fresh air.

"What an awful noise the water is making," said Lilian, as they entered the last of the chambers on the inner side of the lake. At the same moment Carlo, who was a few paces ahead, stopped short and hastily lowered his candle to the ground.

All his self-possession could not hinder an exclamation of dismay breaking from his lips.

The lake was overflowing its low banks, and the dark waters were creeping over the floor in a thousand snake-like rills; gliding here, deviating there; now with slow, sleepy motion, now with sudden spurt and start; writhing around and swallowing up all before them—rising—rising—ever rising—opposing an impassable barrier to exit.

## VII.

A SORT of niche in the rock, too low to allow of a man standing upright, but amply long and deep enough for him to lie in: masked to view from below by a jutting ledge, and only to be reached by a somewhat perilous climb and the insertion of shoeless feet into the sharp, irregular interstices of the limestone. A bed of dried leaves and fern within the cavity, and upon that bed a man of some thirty years of age, lithe and active in form, marked and mobile in feature. He lay upon his back almost in darkness, one arm across his forehead, the other flung upon the fern amid whose dry fronds his fingers were nervously working.

A feeble ray of light filtered in through a narrow opening near his

feet—an opening that had been artfully closed with green, leafy twigs, so as, from without, to deceive the eye of any but a very near observer. The man's eyes were closed, though it was evident he was not sleeping. The working fingers and a frequent convulsive start gave evidence of the unrest within. There he lay in the more than semi-darkness, with the remembrances of the past rising in cruel array before him: a prisoner as firmly fettered as if the deepest dungeon of the fortress awaiting him had already closed over him; a prey to cruel visions that surged unceasingly up in never-ceasing, ever-changing array.

Long forgotten trifles floated like blossoms upon the torrent of regretful remorse that was wearing his heart and soul away.

He was a youth once more—gay among the gayest—bold amid the boldest—his merry laugh ever the loudest, his lithe foot ever the lightest—the life of every village festival—the light of his widowed mother's days. Years sped on, and the hour came when the cold clay fell upon that loving mother's pale brow, leaving him lonely and abandoned, and cast away upon the tide of life.

But that, too, passed, and he saw himself a happy husband, and an exulting father—rich in all that a wife's love and a child's caress can offer. His home, if a poor one, could boast of a peace and tranquility that is often denied to those of higher standing. His bread, if earned by the sweat of his brow, was only all the sweeter.

Adriano had been employed in one of the many sawmills around Carrara, and his wages had ever been sufficient to allow of his maintaining his little family in comfort.

But Adriano, like all mortals, had his cross to bear, a cross that galled not only his own shoulders, but what was infinitely worse, those of all he loved. This cross was temper. The depths of that large heart were pure and clear as those of a mountain lake, but like that same lake, subject to terrible storms—storms which in an instant broke up and shattered all the lovely images usually reflected there. In a moment of ungovernable passion, yielding to a certain provocation, he had done what, alas, is so often done in Carrara: stabbed one of his companions with his formidable pocket-knife. One evil moment had sufficed to shatter his household and reduce himself to a fugitive from justice.

The life of the wounded man hung upon a thread. One day hope smiled, the next dark despair showed her stony face and froze the heart of the aggressor's grieving wife as she turned silently away on learning the state of her husband's victim.

She knew where her Adriano lay hid, though she never dared venture to visit him: for she was closely watched by the police, and she knew it. Weekly, however, tidings of her husband were brought her by a faithful friend who carried provisions to the culprit when and how he was able to do so. And with this she must fain content herself till time and destiny should decide their lot.

Things were looking darker than ever. The previous night, Adriano had got word that the wounded man had taken a turn for the worse, that, in fact, hope was all but lost.

"You must try and get off to America," said his friend, rising from his seat beside the unhappy man: "once there, it matters little whether the fellow live or die. Come — don't take on so — there's no good in it. And then, you see ——"

Adriano could not master his grief: his whole frame shook with convulsive sobs.

"My wife! my child!" burst from him in uncontrollable grief.

"Hush! hush! not so loud. One can never tell, you know. It's hard ——"

"My wife! my poor wife! my Toto!" again broke from the poor fellow.

"Yes. Your wife and child are a terrible drag in a business like yours. But with a clear head and a resolute heart all may yet be managed."

Adriano shook his head. His friend continued:

"I have neither one nor the other, you know; I have saved a few francs, and they are heartily yours. Among comrades, you know ——"

Adriano's tears flowed like water.

"Here they are. I brought them on purpose. I know you would do as much for me. There's near a hundred, and with as much more you'll be able to manage. Your wife will try and scrape them together. Now I must be off, and mind you replace the twigs carefully. It makes me laugh to think that none but we know of this other entrance to the grotto. It was a lucky search, that one after the blackbird's nest so long ago, that made us discover it. Addio, amico mio."

Once more the wretched man was alone. But a grain of hope had been sown in his heart, and the silence and gloom seemed to oppress him less.

"Ah" he thought, "if I had but the money to take me over. How I would toil and save till I could send for my wife and my Toto. Gigi, too, has a heart of gold—all his little savings. Well, if God will, he, too, shall be repaid."

He counted over the greasy notes a dozen times, not in avarice, but as he fingered them the silver leaves of hope seemed once more to unfold themselves within his heart. Would they ever blossom? Who could tell? Uncertainty is like a fog, it makes all things, good and bad, loom the bigger through it.

He re-tied the little roll and, child-like, commenced tossing it from hand to hand.

So day after day dragged on. Life reduced to one long night, his home a dripping cavern, his heaven a rocky roof.

Weeks of sojourn there had accustomed his eyes to the pervading

darkness sufficiently to allow of his threading his way pretty freely through the tortuous labyrinths. He was slowly acquiring that sort of sixth sense which naturalists attribute to the bat; and, all unlearned as he was, had more than once likened his present life to the existence of that animal.

## VIII.

"My poor dear Thomas," murmured Mrs. O'Connell, as, seated at her husband's feet, she took one of his huge hands in her own and attempted to comfort him. "Come, don't be downhearted. Sure Carlo says that at the worst we cannot be kept here more than twenty-four hours, as soon as ever the water goes down. Lilian, my child, does it not seem to you that the flood is sinking?"

The girl shook her head in reluctant denial. The party were sitting upon a rocky table at no great distance from the fatal lake, whose dark waters had now overflowed the greater part of the cavern floor. Here but a puddle, there ankle deep—nowhere of any considerable depth, save in the immediate vicinity of the stream, down towards which the broken ground sloped somewhat abruptly. There it tumbled and rolled, foamed and hissed, utterly forbidding even the thought of crossing its turbulent path. All vestige of board and bank had been swallowed up.

They might have found a less dreary and comfortless place in one of the more distant halls, but they naturally wished to remain as near as possible to the spot from which Carlo assured them aid was sure to arrive sooner or later.

Their position was not a pleasant one, but it was unaccompanied by danger of any sort. Mrs. O'Connell bore it bravely, so did Lilian. Fanny and her master, on the contrary, were utterly upset, and together gave way to childish tears and peevish rejection of all attempts at comforting.

Not comfort, however, for Mr. O'Connell unhesitatingly accepted his wife's shawl and cushion, while Fanny curled herself up at the poor lady's feet and fairly pillowed her ebony head upon the frail woman's lap. Carlo had spread his jacket for the ladies, and would have stripped off his waistcoat, but this they would not allow, for the cold seemed to increase hourly, creeping up with damp, stealthy pace, and enveloping life and limb in its chill embrace.

Hunger, too, began its gnawing, for their meal had been but a slight one, after all. And then we all know what a stimulus to appetite is to be found in the utter dearth of provisions. In a couple of hours more, too, they would be totally in the dark. Only one candle remained, and that once consumed, the prospect was not a bright one.

Carlo did all he could to cheer and encourage them. A twenty-four hours' confinement there was nothing to him personally; and, light or no light, he would have felt indifferent to it. He felt quite

equal to groping his way back to the entrance. He had been familiar with the grotto from early boyhood. Besides, he felt sure that help would arrive; for his father and half the village knew of their visit, and not seeing them return would be sure to come and learn what was the matter. But he grieved sincerely for his companions, that is to say for Lilian and Mrs. O'Connell; while, in his heart of hearts, he did not, perhaps, very deeply regret the mishap, as far as the other two were concerned.

Minutes passed heavily; all attempt at conversation had been given up. Carlo and Lilian alone exchanged a sentence or two from time to time.

"Oh, I am so hungry," whimpered Mr. O'Connell at last.

His wife suddenly broke off the prayer she was muttering. "How stupid of me to forget. Now *do* forgive me, Thomas, darling. Sure I had quite forgotten. Where is my bag? Thomas, dear, you might have known that I wouldn't forget your bran biscuits—here they are —I put up three for ye. Eat them, my darling, and heaven bless you."

To his shame be it recorded, he took and devoured them without even making semblance of offering a crumb to the rest.

Their last candle had dwindled to less than half its length: in a very short time they would be left in total darkness.

Carlo stood gazing at the rushing waters, his eye flashing and his fists clenched in impotant rage. There they tumbled on in utter indifference to the silent, shivering group huddled together upon their rocky brink. An ugly word broke from the young man's mobile mouth. He was not perfection by any means, and, to the energetic, there is nothing so exasperating as enforced idleness.

For a moment he had a wild idea of attempting to cross. But, strong swimmer though he was, his good sense told him that he would only be running a useless risk. Patience was the only remedy, as long as the torrent should continue to flash and foam on its furious course as it was now doing, leaping forth from the darkness for a second, to be suddenly swallowed up in the hideous swirl of the unknown.

And, even could he have got safe across, of what real service would he have been to his companions?

"I would give a hundred francs to find some other way out of this devil's cavern," he cried aloud, as he turned despairingly away from the seething tide to rejoin his friends.

"I take you at your word, Carlo Forti," answered a deep voice from out a rocky cleft close behind him, while at the same time a dim form showed itself, and the flickering yellow rays fell upon a pale, worn face, strangely and startlingly lit up by a pair of large, lustrous eyes.

"Adriano! You here?" exclaimed Carlo.

"Zitto, Forti, zitto."

All had started to their feet to gather, after a moment's hesitation, round the speakers.

"Do not fear, there is no one here to betray you. This lady has been to see your wife more than once, and only this morning she spoke so kindly to your Toto——"

"La Signora Inglese—la signora of whom Gigi told me so much? Oh, signora, signora ——"

He flung himself on his knees before her, and grasped the hem of her dress.

"Toto's father," whispered Lilian to the bewildered woman.

"Toto's father?" she repeated, "the assass——" She stopped short.

A loud shout, ringing clear above the din of the waters, awakened a thousand wild echoes through the cavern; at the same time a red blaze flashed forth from the darkness beyond the waters.

There they came—two—three—ten—twenty—half the population of Torano headed by Carlo's father, each a blazing torch in hand, the red light flashing fitfully upon the leathern belts and brass buttons of a couple of policemen, and playing brightly upon the silver lace of a tall carabineer.

Out from the darkness they crowded, halting upon the bank of the swollen stream in long array, holding their lights on high, and making the rocky roof ring again with their shouts of sympathy and encouragement. Instinctively, perhaps, Mrs. O'Connell had stepped before the kneeling Adriano as soon as she descried the police officers. Their uniforms had apparently petrified the poor wretch, for he made no attempt to move. She effectually screened him from the view of those upon the opposite bank.

The old black dress with its seedy convolvuluses proved a momentary barrier; and, even had the police caught sight of the culprit, were not the rushing, raving waters there to keep them at bay.

Lilian pressed to Mrs. O'Connell's side. Fanny, on the contrary, crossed over to where Mr. O'Connell was standing gazing about him with a dazed air.

"Why don't we leave the place?" he exclaimed feebly. "I want to get home. What are we waiting for? And what is that man crouching there at your feet for? Tell him to get up—tell him to get up, do you hear? I won't have a man clinging to your skirts in that fashion. Away, I say ——"

His words, even had they been audible to those on the other side, could not have been understood by them. His gestures, however, as he pointed to some—to them—unseen object behind the two women were beginning to awaken curiosity.

The carabineer, thrusting his torch into the hand of the man next him, stepped knee-deep into the water, peering fixedly across as if scenting a mystery, and trying to solve it.

"Come away," repeated O'Connell, now thoroughly exasperated; "come away, I say—I won't have this sort of thing—I ——"

He completed the sentence by seizing his wife by the arm and dragging her forcibly aside. His voice rose to a shrill shriek, his features worked, he raised his arm to drag Lilian aside also.

"Down with your hand, Mr. O'Connell. Touch me at your peril. Do you not know that this man, and this man alone, can get us out of this place without hours of long waiting? And if the police see him, he is lost. Can you not ——"

She was stopped by a sudden exclamation from those around.

The carabineer had evidently got an inkling of the state of affairs, for he was partly undressing. Hat and sword were flung aside, coat and boots cast off. There he stood, his revolver between his teeth. The next moment he was amid the maddened waters, whilst a cry of mingled terror, admiration and derision rose from the watchers on the bank.

In the excitement of the moment Adriano had started to his feet. The light fell full upon his pallid features. There—the carabineer has recognised him—for, with a menacing gesture, he plunges yet deeper into the rushing tide.

"Run for it," whispered Carlo to Adriano, "he'll never catch you, even if he does get over."

But Adriano stood motionless, fascinated like the rest by the strange horror of the struggle about to take place.

Stumbling forwards over the broken bed, now swayed to one side, now swerving to the other, on came the white form, showing spectre-like forth from the inky mass of seething water. Ever struggling, ever advancing. Struggling sternly with the flood now frantically seeking to sweep the intrepid intruder off his legs, sweep him triumphantly away to death. Now he swam for a moment amid the black waves—the instant after his flesh was being cruelly torn by the sharp, jagged points upon which he was ruthlessly cast—now he was suddenly borne quite off his feet, then again tossed like a cork amid the whirling eddies: a human toy in the power of a million sporting demons.

Mrs. O'Connel sank upon her knees and prayed aloud. Fanny uttered one shrill shriek after another. The rest gazed in horrified silence.

On struggled the gallant fellow, his revolver between his tightly-closed teeth, his eye measuring every inch of the frantic waters—his iron muscle disputing every line of distance.

Nearer and nearer.

He glances for a second across at Adriano. His strength seems to redouble. Another effort like that and the victory is his. There, a couple of strokes more and he will be safely landed.

"Run, Adriano, run," whispered Carlo, seizing him at the same time by the arm, and endeavouring to push him from the spot. "Run, I say. Don't you see that ——?"

A cry of horror cuts him short.

With a wild toss of both arms on high, the white form rolls heavily over and disappears beneath the black bosom of the waters.

A plunge. Adriano has dashed in to the rescue.

At the same instant the solitary candle, with a farewell flash, suddenly leaps out of life, leaving the gazing group enveloped in a double horror of darkness and doubt.

## IX.

THE vintage is over. A vinous smell emanates from and hovers about and around every dwelling. The leaves of the vines have put on their gorgeous hues, as if to make up for the loss of the purple and amber clusters so lately stripped from their wreathing branches. October is flinging her many-tinted mantle over the earth, bidding the dark evergreens stand forth in solemn relief amid the surrounding glories, and causing the olive to wave yet more sadly in the awakening winds.

Lilian is standing at the end of the vineyard, looking eagerly down the rocky pathway leading to Carrara. Nor does she turn at the sound of steps coming up behind her. She looks round only upon old Forti's laying his hand kindly upon her shoulder.

"One would say you had been married but as many weeks as months, by your standing here, all absorbed in the look-out for your husband. God bless you, my daughter, God bless you; for you have brought sunshine to the house, such as I never hoped to have seen again."

Lilian laughed pleasantly, and caught the old man's hand in hers.

"Ah, father, it's not quite all for Carlo that I am here. I want to know how Adriano's trial has ended. Sentence was to be pronounced at Massa to-day, you know; and Carlo—ah, there he comes! Carlo, Carlo, what news?" And off she ran to meet him, while the old man returned towards the house.

"Good news, dearest, good news! That is, comparatively. Adriano has got off with a year's imprisonment. Provocation was fully proved; and then, after all, the man got well again, you know."

"Yes—thank God."

"And his having saved that Carabineer's life at the risk of his own. I shall never forget how he dragged him out of the water in that cursed cavern; he was more like a Newfoundland dog than a man. A brave fellow, indeed. Well, you see, all that did a great deal for him, to say nothing of his having got us all comfortably out of the place."

"Comfortably? All?"

"Well, no. Not quite all. Poor old O'Connell. Ah, it was no easy matter to squeeze him through the narrow crevice. Do you remember——"

The recollection of the scene overpowered him, and he broke into

a peal of laughter that rang clear upon the crisp autumn air— a peal in which Lilian heartily joined.

Old Forti stayed his work amid his vats at the sound, and nodded approvingly.

"Oh, Carlo, mio, we must go this evening and see Adriano's wife, poor woman. Can't we?"

"This moment if you wish it, love. But stay, I have a letter for you."

"From England," cried Lilian glancing at the stamp: "and from dear old Mrs. O'Connell."

"Come under the trellice and read it out to me, darling; the sun is burning here, and I don't want my little wife to have her English complexion spoiled. Come."

They went, and, nodding as they passed to old Forti busy among his vats, seated themselves upon a rustic bench, he with his brawny arm around her slim waist, she with her blonde head lightly laid upon his shoulder. Forgive them. Their married life was yet so young and dreamlike.

"Well?" murmured Carlo, looking fondly down and kissing the wealth of golden hair that lay so temptingly within reach.

Lilian commenced her letter over again: this time translating aloud to her listening husband. Carlo nodded approval at the close of each sentence. You would have said that he was supplying the punctuation which Mrs. O'Connell was somewhat given to neglecting.

The writer and her husband would have liked to return to Ireland, but they feared the troublous times there. They were, for the present, in London lodgings, and would, perhaps, end by going back to Africa. Nothing was settled as yet, everything depended upon circumstances. One thing, however, had been happily effected. "Sunny Italy" was fairly in the press. The "Prince" had graciously accepted the dedication of the same. "Thomas" was in a fever of bliss in consequence. Fanny was growing difficult to manage, etc. etc. Such was the gist of the letter.

"Carlo, mio, I want you to promise me something," said Lilian, as she folded up her old friend's kindly epistle: "will you?"

"Can you ask?"

"Well, then, you will help that poor woman's husband to find work when he comes out of prison. Am I, perhaps, asking too much?"

"Were it ten times more, you should not ask in vain. I will do all you wish. Toto is getting to be worth his weight in gold already, he minds the cows as none of his predecessors ever did before him."

"And you pay him double wages, you dear, kind fellow. I know you do, for his mother told me so."

"Hush! hush! father might hear you, and ——"

A kiss finished the phrase. Could my tale end with anything better?

A. Beresford.

# SUCH STUFF AS DREAMS ARE MADE OF.

By Darley Dale.

I AM not superstitious.

I am inclined to believe too little rather than too much.

I am not romantic.

On the contrary, I have as little romance in my composition as most men of my profession.

I am a lawyer, and I am—truthful; and the story I have to tell is as superstitious and romantic as it is true.

Five years ago I was made junior partner in the firm to which I had formerly been articled; and I certainly was no sleeping partner, for I had to work exceedingly hard. I was young, and strong and healthy; and the work did me no harm, while the pay was exceedingly good; so good that, although I did not live up to my income, I lived in ease and thoroughly enjoyed life.

My father was anxious I should marry, and I was not averse to doing so if I could find a suitable wife. I had no romantic notions; my demands were not exorbitant; all I desired was a pretty, sensible and amiable girl, and if she had money, all the better. It was not difficult to find the article I wanted; there are plenty of such girls to be had; in fact, it was an embarras de richesses, and the only obstacle to my happiness was I could not make up my mind which to choose.

My father grew impatient and urged me to decide the matter, and just as I had made up my mind to propose to the prettiest, most amiable and most sensible girl I knew, I had a dream.

Now comes the superstitious part of my tale. I dreamt I was in a foreign city; but whether the city was in Europe, Asia, Africa or America, I could not tell. It was a cold winter's night when I dreamt this dream, but the city was flooded in summer sun.

I remembered very little about the place; all was dim and misty. But from this vague background, this fact stood out distinct and clear: viz., I walked along a narrow street with stone arcades on both sides of it, until the sight of a church with seven domes burst upon me; and, as I walked, I passed two men, each carrying two copper kettles on a curved stick, placed over their left shoulders.

Then suddenly the scene changed, and I was inside the seven-domed church, and standing before a large altar in a side chapel, before which was a magnificent screen of carved white marble.

The details of the chapel, the shrine, the altar, with its big candles, and the statue of some saint, were all blurred and misty; one thing only I noticed distinctly, and that was the capitals of two of the marble pillars of the screen were dogs.

I was wondering how so strange an idea had occurred to the

architect, when my attention was drawn to a figure kneeling on the steps at the side of the altar.

I moved a little on one side to get a fuller view of the loveliest face, to my thinking, I had ever seen, and as I did so my heart beat fast, for "it was borne in upon me," as the Methodists say, that there knelt my fate.

She was a girl, but of her nationality I could form no guess; she might be German, English, American, Danish, Swedish or the Italian who sat to Raphael for his Saint Katherine in our National Gallery. She had the same delicately-carved oval face; the same pale, golden-brown hair; the same gentle hazel eyes; the same rapt expression, as if Heaven were open to her gaze as her lips moved in prayer.

As I stood entranced, watching her, she rose, and, with a smile on her face, vanished. Before I had time to regret this, with the quickness of dreams, the scene changed, and I found myself standing before an altar in a church I did not recognise, with the same girl, in bridal attire, by my side; and as I placed a wedding-ring upon her finger, I felt I was the happiest man on earth. Then I woke, and felt I was the most miserable.

Now begins the romantic part of my story. From that hour I was in love—really, seriously, passionately in love with the girl of my dream. She was no mere ideal, no creation of my fancy; for me she was a reality, a divine reality, and I soon became convinced she was on earth somewhere waiting for me.

Somewhere! Aye, but where?

There was the problem I had to solve, for I was determined to find her; to do so was now the one aim and object of my life. Day and night I racked my brain to recall the city of my dream—for I was persuaded that there, and there only, should I find her. My futile endeavours to rebuild that dream-city, so that I might find it, drove me nearly mad. I grew nervous and irritable; I lost my appetite; I suffered from insomnia and mental depression; at last I was pronounced by my doctor to be suffering from over-work, and I was ordered perfect rest for twelve months.

I resolved to spend my holiday in searching for my wife, as I called the bride of my dream, so I gave out that I meant to travel. My doctor approved of this, and I started for Venice. Instinct rather than reason drew me there; but I had a vague notion that St. Mark's at Venice might be the church of my dream; so to Venice I went, and a better place, as far as my health was concerned, I could not have hit upon. The delicious silence of that lovely city, broken only by the sound of human voices, and the gentle plash of the gondoliers' oars, and, alas! the rush of the steamers which now ply up and down the grand canal; this silence, the lazy, dreamy life, the calm beauty of this earthly paradise, soothed my tired nerves, and brought peace to my troubled spirit. I did not find what I came to

search for, but I found health, and, like most people, I was loth to leave the glowing canvases of the Venetian painters, the cusped arches and carved façades of the marble palaces, the richly coloured mosaics and gilded cupolas of St. Mark's, the hearse-like gondolas with their silver prows, the gay scene in the Piazza, the calm beauty of the narrow side canals, and the wealth of art in which Venice abounds.

I was hopeful now, and I left Venice at the end of a month for Constantinople, the city of domes, hoping that there I should find the seven-domed church of my dream.

My idea now was, I must go East, and East I went. To cut my travels short, I went not only East, but West, and North and South also, and with precisely the same result everywhere. I never found a city which resembled in the least the city of my dream; I never found a face, except in Raphael's pictures, which resembled the face of my dream-wife.

One year I wandered over the earth searching for the wife of my dream, sometimes buoyed up with hope, sometimes plunged in despair. As I grew stronger, the hope grew fainter, the despair less desperate, and when I returned to England I returned a wiser but a sadder man. I resolved henceforth to treat my dream only as a dream, unworthy of another thought from a sensible man, and I determined to settle down again to work like a reasonable being.

I did so, I buckled to, and I worked harder than ever. Work was a necessity; it crushed out all thought of my dream trouble, which I began seriously to fear was a mental delusion, which, if indulged, might develop into monomania, or even melancholia.

The only thing I could not do was to bring myself to marry, although my father and my friends urged me strongly to do so; and I felt I was not cured of my delusion until I could do so. My horror of insanity, in any shape or form, is so great that at last I determined I would marry, simply to complete my cure, and that autumn—that was two years since my dream—I found myself engaged to a pretty, sensible, amiable girl named Mabel Stuart. I did not tell her the story of my dream, I think now I ought to have done so; but I wanted to forget it, lest in remembering it my mind should become affected.

We were a very matter-of-fact couple. I was not in love with Mabel, neither was she with me; but we were excellent friends, and the happiest marriages are often based on friendship. The marriage was fixed for the following Easter. I wished it to be earlier, but Mabel would not consent. Her brother was in India with his regiment, and nothing, she declared, should induce her to be married until he came back, which he would do in April.

Easter was late that year; it did not fall till the end of April, and our wedding day was fixed for the 30th. At the beginning of the month, some very tiresome but important business made it necessary for me to go to Padua for a few days.

Annoyed as I was at having to leave London just then, I resolved to go, for no one else could transact this business quite as well as I could; so, with many grumblings and growlings, I set off.

Unlike Lucentio, I had no "great desire to see fair Padua, nursery of arts," and I arrived prepared to find it the most uninteresting place on the face of the earth.

I scarcely looked at the town as I drove from the station to the hotel; but the general impression the place made on me was that there were very few foreigners to be seen; but as Padua is somewhat off the beaten track of tourists, this was not surprising; there were also many more men than women in the streets; but then I remembered it was a university town. The houses were of white stone, and the glare of the sun was intense, even in early April.

I had two hours before dinner, and as I could do no business that day, I asked what there was to be seen in Padua, and I was directed to the Church of S. Anthony, the patron-saint of the place. Il Santo, as the Paduans call him and his church.

The streets, I now noticed, were narrow and had arcades, under which I gladly walked for the sake of the shade; still I had no recollection of my dream's arcaded streets, until presently I passed a man carrying two copper vessels like kettles, one at each end of a curved stick, over his shoulder. Instantly it flashed upon me that Padua was the city of my dream. The heat, the arcaded streets, the water-carrier, all were there; if the seven-domed church were also there, no shadow of doubt would remain.

With beating heart and quickened pulses, I hurried on past the shops, full of cheap rubbish, which lined the arcade, till, at the end of the street, I descried an ugly brick building, more beautiful in my eyes than the Cathedral at Florence, the fairest building on earth, for it was a church with seven domes. Like a madman I ran towards it, pushing aside the shopkeepers, who, seeing a stranger pass, came out of their shops to offer me rosaries and images and pictures of the Saint. Breathless I reached it and entered.

At first I saw nothing inside the church to remind me of the second part of my dream; but, as I advanced up the aisle, I came to the shrine of S. Anthony guarded by dogs, and recognised at once the altar near which I had seen my dream-wife.

There were the dogs on the capitals still keeping watch; there was the marble screen; there was the altar, with its lighted candles and statue of the Saint; and there—there, was my wife.

Not Mabel, not the girl I was engaged to marry in three weeks' time, but the girl of my dream, my love, my bride; and if of flesh and blood, the only woman I meant to marry.

I could have shouted for joy; I could barely contain myself; I longed to seize her and clasp her to my bosom as my long-lost and long-sought bride.

I was mad with joy.

I forgot my business, my marriage, Mabel, everything; all I saw, all I thought of was that kneeling figure.

There she knelt, just as I had seen her in my dream, her lips moving in prayer.

Would she vanish as in the dream?

If so, I should go raving mad; of that, I felt certain, for I was awake and, I believed, in my right mind.

In fear and trembling I stood and watched her, feeling that my reason, as well as my happiness, was trembling in the balance. At length she rose, picked up a sunshade which lay at her feet (I breathed more freely; I knew she was mortal) and went round to the back of the shrine, where was the tomb containing the body of S. Anthony. I followed in time to see her kiss the marble slab of the tomb, and oh, how I envied that tomb! Here she was joined by another lady whom I rightly guessed to be her mother, and they moved away to look at Giotto's portrait of the Saint, which I heard them say in English was in the chancel.

I was determined to speak to them; and, as they were probably the only English people besides myself in Padua, I could easily make some excuse for doing so. I began by asking them where Giotto's portrait, which I heard of a moment before for the first time in my life, was; and as we looked at it we got into conversation.

"Is there much to see in Padua?" I asked.

"There are Giotto's frescoes in S. Maria dell' Arena, said to be the finest in Italy; you must see them," said my dream-bride.

"There is plenty to see here. You can *do* Padua in a day, but a week is too short to exhaust its beauties in. We have been here a week and we shall stay another," said her mother.

"How many days have you to spare for Padua?" said my dream-wife.

"Oh! I am not pressed for time. I shall stay a week at least. I am at the Stella d'Or," I answered, hoping to hear they were also.

"So are we; so we shall meet again," said the mother. A hint of dismissal I was obliged to take.

Then followed a week of delirious happiness, spent mostly with my new friends in exploring the beauties of Padua; the intervals were occasionally occupied with my business.

Together we studied Giotto's frescoes one morning, Titian's another, Mantegna's another; together we sauntered round the busy Piazzas of Erbi and Frutti, with that large hall in the centre; the fruit market on one side and the vegetable market on the other; together we admired the beautiful Thirteenth Century architecture of the baptistry; together we drove round the great modern sunny Piazza of Vittorio Emanuele, with its grass centre and statues round it; together we sat in the shade of the botanical gardens, or wandered through the narrow arcaded streets, admiring the quaint knockers and the picturesque appearance of some of the houses.

The more I saw of Katherine—that was her name, though neither saint nor shrew, but just the sweetest thing in creation—the more I loved her; the more determined I was to marry her. The more certain I felt our marriage was made in Heaven, the more puzzled I was how to accomplish it on earth.

"Where there's a will there's a way," says the proverb, but strong as my will was, I could see no way out of my dilemma, no way consistent with honour at least. Of course I could make a clean breast of it to Mabel and ask her to release me, but I should deserve to be horsewhipped for my pains if I did so; no sane person would believe in my dream-story, true as it nevertheless was.

I was at once the happiest and most miserable of men: happiest because I had reason to hope my love was returned; wretched because I was doing wrong, and could see no way of repentance.

The only way which suggested itself was to put a bullet through my excited brain; but this my conscience would not let me do. At last I made up my mind; I would tell Katherine and her mother the whole truth, and act upon their advice. They would believe my dream story; Mabel, I knew, wouldn't. I was on the point of making this confession to Katherine first, when, just as I was going to join her for that purpose on the balcony of the hotel one evening, a letter was brought me from Mabel, with a foreign post-mark.

Wondering what this might mean, I broke the seal, and read as follows:

"My dear Jack,

"When you get this I shall be the wife of Captain Bond, a brother officer of Tom's. We have loved each other all our lives, but our people would never hear of it, as he has only his pay. They will hear of it now, though. You never loved me, you know, so though I am behaving disgracefully, I think you will soon find someone to console you. I could not help it, Jack; my life at home would have been spelt in four letters if I had refused you. And I was so fond of Charlie! All the same, I am treating you very badly, but I hope you will still be my best friend.

"Mabel."

That day I was engaged to Katherine. We were married that summer, and I am as happy as man can be with the wife of my dream.

Katherine has never told me what she was praying for that day I found her before S. Anthony's shrine; but on enquiry I have discovered he is the saint the Paduans invoke when they want to find a wife or a husband. He found my wife for me, though I never asked him.

Did Katherine?

M. L. GOW R. TAYLOR

"DO YOU TRAVEL ALONE?"

THE ARGOSY.

*DECEMBER, 1891.*

# THE FATE OF THE HARA DIAMOND.

## CHAPTER XLIV.

### THE ARRIVAL OF THE DIAMOND AT DEEPLEY WALLS.

MR. SOLOMON MADGIN had not failed to inform Lady Chillington from time to time of the progress that was being made in the attempt to recover the Great Hara Diamond. This he had done without entering into any minute details of the case, of which, indeed, her ladyship cared to hear nothing. It was enough for her to be told every few days that M. Madgin still held the clue in his fingers, and that each step that he took would, to the best of his belief, bring him so much nearer the object the attainment of which they both had so deeply at heart.

Lady Chillington had of course been apprised that Mr. Madgin's presence in Jersey was needed for the furtherance of their scheme; but when he had been gone a week and no news of any kind had been received from him, she began to grow not only impatient, but uneasy lest Mr. Madgin should in any way have come to grief. She could neither eat nor sleep as she was wont to do, but wandered aimlessly up and down the great empty rooms at Deepley Walls, leaning on Janet's arm, and either muttering to herself about people who had long been dead, or complaining querulously that Mr. Madgin, the man whom she had trusted above all others, had also failed her in her time of need.

To Janet that was indeed a season of heartweariness. She had not had time to recover from the crushing blow which her mother's death had inflicted upon her. Many a time she woke up in the night and found herself in tears, for not even in sleep could she forget the loss of her whom she had learned to love so dearly, while still ignorant of the tie that bound them so closely together.

With nerves unstrung, and a heart that was ill at ease, it is not to be wondered at that even from the very quest which George Strickland had gone upon her mind seemed to draw in and gather

to itself certain premonitions, vague and faint, of further unhappiness to come. She longed for and yet dreaded the coming of each post. Major Strickland sometimes wrote to her, and any morsel of news was precious to her that had any reference, however remote, to Captain George. And yet she never opened one of the Major's notes without trembling lest it might contain some news of a hitherto unknown father who might, perchance, come and claim her, and take her away for ever from a spot which her mother's memory made sacred to her, and from those faithful friends to whom her young affections clung so tenaciously.

Janet's life at Deepley Walls was one which few people would have envied her. From the date of Sister Agnes' death, Lady Chillington had grown more exacting in her requirements, more capricious in her moods, more difficult to please than she had ever been before. There was a terrible wakefulness about her. What sleep she had was intermittent and of short duration; and Janet herself never got to bed without being wearied out both in body and spirit with her long attendance on the strange old woman. Often, when she had not been asleep more than a couple of hours, Lady Chillington's bell would ring violently, and then Janet had to rise and dress herself and hasten to the old woman's room, to find that she was wanted to read aloud, or, it might be, to play écarté, while her ladyship sat up in bed with a gay Indian shawl thrown round her shoulders, her withered face bent keenly over her cards, and an occasional hollow chuckle issuing from her lips. At the end of a couple of hours or so she would go off to sleep almost as suddenly as if she were an automaton whose eyes were made to shut at the touch of a spring. Then Janet would creep back shivering to bed, only to begin another day's dreary round a few hours later.

During the last few weeks Lady Chillington had seemed as if she could scarcely bear to let Janet out of her sight. Not that she was in any way more affectionate towards her than she had ever been. Her manner was still as hard, her tongue was still as caustic as of old. But she seemed now as if she could not bear to be alone: as if constant companionship with Janet's fresh and sweet young nature were needed to keep alive the slowly decaying embers of her life. Be that as it may, Janet's time was so fully occupied that it was all she could do to steal one short hour out of the twenty-four for a solitary ramble in the park: but without such a walk she felt that she should soon have broken down under the exactions of her life at Deepley Walls. A visit to Major Strickland at Tydsbury was now entirely out of the question. As already stated, the post now and then brought her a brief note from him. As the tenor of these notes was invariably affectionate and reassuring, they were cherished by her as the chiefest grains of comfort by which the dreary passage of time was brightened at Deepley Walls.

As previous chapters have already told us, George Strickland was still busy with his quest at the very time that Mr. Madgin was on his way back to Deepley Walls with the Great Hara Diamond in his possession. Consequently, Captain Ducie was still among the living, and George Strickland had not yet left London in search of him, when on a certain morning a telegram sent by Mr. Madgin from Southampton was brought to Lady Chillington. It was brief and to the purpose :—

"Thoroughly successful. The Great Hara is travelling with me. His Highness will reach Deepley Walls to-morrow."

Lady Chillington was sitting up in bed drinking her chocolate when the message was taken in to her. She requested Janet to read it aloud. The cup and saucer dropped from her fingers as Janet read.

She turned quite white and faint, and for a minute or two was unable to speak. After smelling awhile at her salts, she revived, and asked Janet to read the message a second time.

"That good Madgin!" she exclaimed. "What a thing it is to be served faithfully!" Then turning to Janet: "See, child, what can be accomplished by intelligence and perseverance!" she cried. "When Sergeant Nicholas came here and told his story, how hopeless it seemed to expect that my poor boy's Diamond would ever be recovered for me: and yet, behold, it is here, and the wicked are brought to confusion!"

During the whole of that day her ladyship was very much elated, and correspondingly gracious and good-tempered towards Janet. In the afternoon they drove to Eastbury, and there her ladyship was pleased to buy a set of bog-oak ornaments for Miss Hope: an almost unprecedented piece of liberality on the part of the mistress of Deepley Walls.

Late the same night came a message from Mr. Madgin stating that he should be at Deepley Walls at ten o'clock the following morning.

By that hour next morning her ladyship was up and dressed, ready to receive company. Had Lady Chillington been going to a dinner party at Langley Castle she could not have been got up more elaborately than she was on the present occasion. Her choicest coiffure, her stiffest silk, her most ancient lace, her largest diamonds, together with an extra streak of rouge and an extra touch of the powder-puff, had all been employed to dignify and render memorable the approaching ceremonial. Her ladyship was too much excited to partake of breakfast, but when everything was ready she called for a small glass of curaçoa and cream, and then taking Janet's arm, and supported on the other side by her gold-headed malacca, she descended the shallow staircase with slow and stately steps, and reached the great hall just as the clocks were striking ten.

She knew that Mr. Madgin was punctuality itself. She had reached the centre of the hall as the clocks ceased striking, and the same instant there was a loud knocking at the grand entrance. Mr. Madgin's fine instinct had told him that on this occasion, if never again, he must enter Deepley Walls as if he were a visitor of state, and not by the modest side-door through which his entrances and exits had heretofore been made. One of the two faded servitors in faded livery whom Lady Chillington still retained flung wide the door. Mr. Madgin in his Sunday suit of black, with white neckcloth and gold-rimmmed eye-glass dangling across his waistcoat, advanced slowly into the hall, removed his hat and bowed profoundly. Lady Chillington, on her side, made her most stately and elaborate curtsey. Mr. Madgin came forward; Lady Chillington advanced a step or two and held out her hand. Mr. Madgin carried the lean and ancient fingers respectfully to his lips.

"I return from fulfilling your ladyship's behests," he said. "I also bring with me a trifling memento of my journey, of which I humbly request your ladyship's acceptance."

Speaking thus, Mr. Madgin produced from one of his pockets a tiny casket of imitation Byzantine workmanship which he had bought while passing through London. Touching a spring, the lid flew open, and there, on a cushion of white satin, lay the glittering source of so many hopes and fears, of so much happiness and misery—the Great Hara Diamond.

For a moment or two Lady Chillington stood perfectly still, eyeing the glittering bauble, without speaking. Breathing a little faster than she was wont, she at length put forth a trembling hand and received the casket and its contents from Mr. Madgin.

"Follow me," she said in a voice that was shaken by emotion. Then she turned, and, discarding for once the assistance of Janet's arm, and carrying the open casket before her, she began to retrace her way slowly and painfully towards her own apartments. Miss Hope and Mr. Madgin followed at a respectful distance.

On reaching her private sitting-room Lady Chillington sat down in her high-backed chair of carved oak, and motioned to Mr. Madgin first to shut the door, and next to take a seat.

"Mr. Madgin," said her ladyship after a few moments, "any formula of thanks which I could put into words would be totally inadequate to express my feelings towards you for the great service you have just done me. I can only say that you are no longer my servant but my friend."

"Madam, I am overwhelmed by the honour you have just conferred upon me," answered Mr. Madgin, as he rose, laid his hand on his heart and bowed. "Such a recognition of my humble merits is far beyond my deserts."

"Mr. Madgin," resumed Lady Chillington in her most stately manner, "if you will honour me by accepting my friendship, it is yours.

"Too much honour, really," murmured Mr. Madgin in a distressed voice.

Lady Chillington waved her arm, as if that portion of the subject were beyond the pale of further discussion.

"At the same time, Mr. Madgin," she resumed, "you must not for one moment imagine that I wish to forego the least portion of that pecuniary reward which was promised you when you first took in hand the remarkable inquiry which you have this day brought to such a successful issue. I have here, ready made out and signed, a cheque for the sum agreed on. I am quite aware that to a man of your noble and disinterested character the mere pecuniary part of the affair will seem of small account in comparison with that other gift which I have just conferred upon you."

Mr. Madgin's face had brightened wonderfully during the last minute or two. With his hand he mechanically smoothed the gray hair across his forehead before he answered.

"What a remarkable knowledge of character your ladyship displays," he said deferentially. "How well you understand the disposition of Solomon Madgin. Money does indeed seem dross when weighed against the golden gift of friendship." He coughed slightly behind his hand, and looked a little anxiously at her ladyship.

"Take the cheque, Mr. Madgin," she said as she handed him the magic slip of paper. "You must come and dine with me to-morrow. At the same time bring me an account of the expenses incurred by you over this affair, and a second cheque shall at once be given you for the amount."

Mr. Madgin was nearly overcome, and could only murmur a few indistinct words in reply.

"Perchance, Solomon Madgin, you look upon me as nothing better than a mercenary old woman." Mr. Madgin vehemently disclaimed any such idea. "But I tell you," resumed Lady Chillington, with emphasis, "that I value this magnificent gem less, infinitely less, for its pecuniary value, than because I know it to be a true and veritable relic of my dear dead son. His fingers have held it; his eyes have looked on it; it was in his keeping when he died; it was his parting gift to me, his mother, who held him in her heart of hearts as dearer to her than all else the world could offer. In that fact lay the root of my strong desire to possess this stone. And now that I have it I can hold it but for a little while. Soon the day will come, when—— But why pursue the dreary suggestion any further? Enough for the day is the evil thereof. Let the morrow take care of itself. And now, again thanks, and then good morning. To-morrow you will dine with me."

"One word before I go," said Mr. Madgin as he rose. "May I venture to express a hope that it is not your ladyship's intention to retain so valuable a gem in your personal possession? Think of the

risk you run of its being lost or stolen. Let me entreat you, that without any unnecessary delay your ladyship will give it into the custody either of your banker, or of some other person who has the means and the will to keep it safely."

"There is sense in what you say, Solomon Madgin, but I cannot persuade myself to part from my dear boy's relic almost as soon as it has come into my hands. For the present I shall certainly retain it in my own custody. I will take very good care not to lose it, and as for its being stolen, there is no one save yourself and Miss Hope who knows that I have such an article in my possession. And I think I can trust both of you to keep my secret."

Mr. Madgin saw that it would be impolitic to urge the point any further at present; so, after bidding her ladyship a respectful farewell, he withdrew without further remark.

## CHAPTER XLV.

### DE MORTUIS NIL NISI BONUM.

Lady Chillington was obliged to go to bed almost immediately after the departure of Mr. Madgin from Deepley Walls. Now that the long-coveted gem was in her possession, the excitement that had upheld her during the ardour of pursuit at once died out, leaving her utterly prostrate and to all appearance half-a-dozen years older than when she rose in the morning. The reaction was too much for her enfeebled health, and she lay in bed all that day and all the following day, speaking little to anyone, but often talking disconnectedly to herself, and seeming sometimes as though she were addressing imaginary persons by her bedside. During the whole of this time she had held the Diamond, now in one hand, now in the other, often gazing at it, sometimes kissing it and talking to it as though it could understand everything she said.

But whatever might be the mental hallucinations of Lady Chillington at this time, her perception of the real events that were happening round her, and her criticism of those in attendance on her were in no degree impaired. She had never exacted more attention from Miss Hope: had never been more difficult to please. She would not allow her invitation to Mr. Madgin to be countermanded. That gentleman, accordingly, dined in solitary state in the great saloon, waited on by the solemn butler, and treated in every respect as a guest of distinction. Her ladyship sent down her compliments by Miss Hope, with an expression of regret at her inability to join Mr. Madgin at table. The next day she was somewhat better, and the day following that she was up and about again, wandering restlessly to and fro through the stately but silent rooms, or on to the warm south terrace for a few minutes in the middle of the day. But it seemed to Janet that the old woman's arm rested more

heavily on hers than it was wont to do, that she walked more slowly, and had to halt more frequently to rest. That strange wakefulness which would not allow her to sleep except by fits and starts, was still upon her. She had caused Janet's bed to be removed into a corner of her own large room, so that Janet might be more immediately within call. Many were the nights that Janet never got into bed at all, but had to satisfy herself with flying snatches of sleep in a large arm-chair by her ladyship's bed-side. Sometimes Lady Chillington would lie awake for two or three hours in the middle of the night with wide-open eyes fixed solemnly on the canopy over her head, requiring no attendance, and never speaking except when she perceived signs of drowsiness in Janet, who was stationed where she could be seen by a mere turn of the eyes. Then would her ladyship's voice ring out clear and sharp: "Miss Hope! Miss Hope: the devil is behind you, about to cut off your hair with a pair of shears." Or perhaps: "Miss Hope! Miss Hope! there is a large grey rat staring at you out of the corner. Do make haste and frighten him away."

Janet had neither seen nor heard anything of Major Strickland for more than a week. Her fears were beginning to overmaster her. She had a prevision that there was ill news in store for her. Would the errand on which George Strickland was gone bring her happiness or misery? was the question which she was continually putting to herself. Had she a father alive? And if alive, would he prove to be a friend—a protector? Or, would he prove to be one whom she could neither love nor reverence?—one who by his conduct to her mother had shown by what falsehood and treachery his heart was compact? Hard and dreary as was her life at Deepley Walls since the death of Sister Agnes, it was still redeemed by occasional flying gleams of sunshine—sunshine which left some portion of its warmth in her heart after its brightness had passed away. What she dreaded was that George Strickland's quest might so result as to deprive her of even this consolation; that it might result in proving her to be the daughter of some ruined and disgraced man who would claim her as his own, and sever with a merciless hand all those sweet tendrils of love and friendship from which her heart's sole nourishment was derived. At length the suspense grew intolerable. She wrote and despatched a brief note to Major Strickland, begging earnestly for news of some kind. This note crossed the Major on the road, who was on his way that very morning to Deepley Walls with the view of telling Janet the news, or such portions of it as he might deem advisable, with which his nephew had reached home over night.

So jealous and exacting had Lady Chillington become of late, that the Major could not go boldly into the house and ask to see Miss Hope. To have done so would have entirely defeated the object of his visit, and would have simply resulted in making Janet, for the

time being, a closer prisoner than ever. But the Major was diplomatic. Making his way through the side entrance to Dolly Dance's room, he contrived to get a whispered message delivered to Miss Hope; but even then he had to wait upwards of two hours before Janet could steal away for a few minutes to listen to what he had to say.

The story which George Strickland had to tell after his return from Jersey was a far more surprising one than the Major had expected to hear. Many of its details were of too painful a nature ever to be communicated to Janet.

How could it benefit anyone to tell the dead man's daughter that her father had been a gambler and a roué, and that he had ended a disgraceful career by committing suicide? Why pain a tender heart by such details? It would be pained sufficiently to know that the father it had hoped to find had only been found when it was too late for him to look upon his daughter in this world—too late even to know that there was a creature so near akin to him in existence. Therefore, as he walked slowly through the park on his way to Deepley Walls, the Major conned over and over the story he had made up his mind to tell, and it was a story which he needed to repeat many times to himself before telling it aloud, for the old soldier was a bad hand at concealments of any kind.

Janet's tears came the moment she set eyes on Major Strickland. She was worn out with anxiety and the long vigils she had had to keep of late. The Major drew her towards him and kissed her tenderly on the forehead. Then her sobs came unrestrainedly, and for a little while she could not give utterance to a word. The Major placed her in a chair and sat down beside her, and gazed at her with anxious eyes, rubbing one of her hands tenderly between his own withered palms, till Janet had in some degree recovered her serenity.

"George reached home last night from his journey," the Major ventured to say at last.

Janet's heart began to beat hurriedly. She looked up into the Major's eyes, and read something there that turned her cheek even paler than it was before.

"You have some bad news to tell me," she said in a low voice, while her hand squeezed that of the Major tightly.

"My poor child, you have neither a mother nor a father," said the Major, with a returning pressure of the hand.

Janet sighed.

"I am no poorer off than I imagined myself to be," she said quietly.

"I have not told you all. Unknown to you, unknown to your mother, your father has been alive all these years. He was living at the time your mother died, and had not our search for him been delayed so long after that event, he would have learnt that he had a

daughter grown up to woman's estate whom he had never seen, and who had never seen him. But when George found him he was deaf to all earthly sounds. Poverina mia, your father died nine days ago."

On Janet's face, as the Major said those words, came a look of pain and bewilderment pitiful to see.

"My poor, poor father!" she murmured. "Only two short weeks ago, and I might have seen him and spoken to him, and have told him how dearly I would love him. If we had but known! If we had but known!"

She was crying quietly and pitifully by this time, in a way that made the old soldier's heart ache to witness.

"Great heaven! what a treasure that man missed when he missed the love of this dear child," said the Major to himself.

"You must please tell me all about it," said Janet after a little while. "What you have just stated seems so utterly strange to me, that at present I can hardly realise the fact that I have not really been the fatherless girl I have all along believed myself to be. Ah! dear Major Strickland, how much I owe to you and other kind friends! Had it not been for your efforts in my behalf, I should never have known what you have told me to-day."

"It would, perhaps, have been as well for your peace of mind if you never had known it."

"Indeed, dear Major Strickland, you must not say that. The truth can never injure us. But now you will tell me, will you not, all that you know or have heard respecting this father whom I shall never see on earth?"

But it was not the Major's intention to tell Janet all that he knew respecting Captain Ducie. The story he did tell her was a mild version of the one that had been told him.

He could not conceal from her the fact that Captain Ducie had purposely abandoned his wife, nor that he had led her to believe that he had been drowned in order that the tie between them might be more completely severed. But he softened both circumstances in the telling, and made as many excuses for the dead man as if he had been a brother of his own.

On Captain Ducie's after-career he dwelt lightly and tenderly, contriving to leave on Janet's mind the impression that her father had been more sinned against than sinning.

Finally, he altogether suppressed the fact of Ducie's suicide, and left Janet to suppose that although her father's death had been a sudden one, it had proceeded from causes that were natural and entirely beyond his own control. What information he had gathered respecting Captain Ducie's relatives and connections he left to be told at some future time.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

### THE DEPARTURE OF SIR JOHN CHILLINGTON.

But now the day was drawing near which had been fixed by Sir John Chillington in his will as that on which his body should be committed to the vault where the bones of several generations of his ancestors already reposed. Sir John would soon have been dead twenty years. On the twentieth anniversary of his decease, his body would leave Deepley Walls for ever.

That this day had long been looked forward to by Lady Chillington, Janet was well aware.

The fierce old woman had often declared that not till the dead body of her husband should be removed from Deepley Walls would the curse that had rested on the house from the day of his death be lifted off it, and rendered powerless for further harm.

In one of the galleries was a portrait of Sir John, which, during the last twelve months, had been visited daily by Lady Chillington. Every time she visited it, she made a practice of sticking a pin through some part of the figure, and leaving it there.

"One day less, Sir John, before the worms claim you as their own," was her usual remark on these occasions.

And then she would nod her head and jeer at the painted semblance of her dead husband.

"We shall have quite a little jubilee the day you leave us, by which you may judge how grieved we shall be to part from you. Another pin. Oh! that you could feel them, and that I could thus repay you in part for some of the thousands of heart-aches you caused me when you were alive!"

After she began to recover from the state of mental and bodily prostration into which she had sunk when no longer sustained by the excitement consequent on the search for the Diamond, she was not long before she was about again, apparently as well and strong as she had been for the last year or two. But to Janet it seemed that much of her strength was fictitious, and that it did not arise from any real improvement in her health, but rather from the necessity which seemed to sit so heavily upon her of being up and doing on the day of Sir John's departure. To be lying weak and ill in bed on such a day would have seemed like an acknowledgment of regret for the departure of her husband to which her proud spirit could by no means submit.

She spoke nothing but the truth when she said that she so thoroughly detested the memory of the man that it would be a day of jubilee for her when his body was borne out of her sight for ever.

She was probably influenced in her determination by another reason, but one which she would have been slow to acknowledge even to herself.

Her mind was powerfully impressed with the idea, that not only was the lifeless body of her husband under the roof of Deepley Walls, but that the house was haunted by his incorporeal presence; that, in fact, his spirit was doomed to wander unrestingly in and about the old house so long as his body—in accordance with his own foolish wish—remained unburied and unsanctified by the rites of Christian sepulture.

Hence the strange habit into which she had fallen of addressing her husband as though he were standing, an invisible presence, close by her elbow, and was cognizant of all she said.

It could not be other than a source of satisfaction to Janet to know that her midnight visits to the Black Room were so soon to come to an end. The duty she had there to perform was one which not even the custom of years could have rendered otherwise than distasteful to her. She never could quite conquer the superstitious thrill which touched her from head to foot every time she opened the door of the dreaded room. She never could quite get over the feeling that an unseen pair of eyes was watching her from behind the funereal drapery that clothed the walls. She could never descend the stairs on her way back to the habitable regions of the house without a nervous shiver at the thought that, perhaps, some shadowy hand was being put forth to clutch her from behind. Janet could not, therefore, be otherwise than pleased to think that the silent tenant of Deepley Walls would so soon have to find another and a more permanent home.

Lady Chillington had named the date a month beforehand which was fixed for the removal of Sir John.

At length the last midnight arrived. Janet had been reading to her ladyship, and when the clock pointed to five minutes to twelve she shut the book and rose to go.

"I will go with you to-night," said her ladyship, who, to all appearance, had been dozing for the last half hour, although Janet had not on that account been allowed to lay down her book.

So arm-in-arm the two went slowly up the long staircases, with many a halt to gather breath. At length the door of the Black Room was reached and opened. Preceded by her ladyship, Janet went in. While she went about her customary duty, Lady Chillington stood sternly erect, resting her crossed hands on the head of her cane, and gazing with hard, unmoved countenance on the coffin of her dead husband.

Janet, in her twilight walk through the garden a few hours previously, had found a couple of late roses. These she had plucked and had fastened them into the bosom of her dress: she now took them out of her dress and laid them reverently on the coffin.

"What are you about, child?" cried Lady Chillington in her most imperious tones. "Flowers are not for such as he. Take them away. For him you should bring the deadly nightshade and

hemlock, and all plants that are hurtful to human life. There are some men, child, that, like the fatal upas tree, have power to blight and poison all who come within their influence. Such a man was he who is nailed up in that box. He blighted my life; he poisoned my son's life and drove him abroad to die in a strange land; he withered the lives of my two daughters, and not content with the evil which he did while living, he left his dead body as a curse that should haunt my life for twenty wretched years. That term is now at an end, and after to-morrow I shall grow twenty years younger, feeling and knowing that neither in time nor in eternity will his baneful presence ever haunt me again."

Suddenly she clutched Janet by the arm, and drew the girl closer to her. "He is there!" she said—"there, behind the black curtains, watching me, listening to every word that I say—as he used to watch and listen when he was alive. There is the same meanness, the same low trickery about him now that he is dead that marked him when he was living. He often visits me—often talks to me—and although he will not acknowledge it, I know that when once his body shall be laid in the vault at Dene Folly, I shall have seen and spoken with him for the last time. To-night, child, you must sit by my bedside all night long, and read aloud from some godly book. Then he will have no power to come near me or harm me. But you must not go to sleep nor cease your reading till you see the first streaks of daylight in the east: after that we are safe. I said he was there. See how yonder curtain stirs and flutters. He will not show himself because you are here. It is only I, I who was his miserable wife for twenty-three long years, that he cares to torment. But come. Let us tarry here no longer. This is his last night, thank heaven! beneath the roof of Deepley Walls."

They went downstairs together as they had come, arm-in-arm, her ladyship shaking her head and mumbling to herself all the way she went. Then she got into bed, and Janet sat by her side all night, reading aloud from a "godly book," while the old woman lay without stirring, with wide-staring solemn eyes that seemed to be gazing on some far-away picture, the subject of which was known to herself alone.

To Mr. Madgin was entrusted the charge of conveying the body of Sir John Chillington to its final resting-place at Dene Folly, forty miles away; and Mr. Madgin was to be the sole "mourner" on the occasion. So Lady Chillington willed it. The body was to leave Deepley Walls at midnight, and be conveyed to the nearest railway station. After a journey of thirty miles by rail it would be met by another hearse and mourning-coach by means of which the third and last stage of the journey would be accomplished.

At a quarter to twelve precisely a hearse and mourning-coach drew up before the main entrance to Deepley Walls. The door was thrown open, and Mr. Madgin—solemn, dignified—glided in,

followed by a number of familiars in black. Still led by Mr. Madgin, they trooped up the grand staircase like so many birds of evil omen hastening to some unholy feast. Not long were they away. presently they reappeared, carrying on their shoulders the burden for which they had come. Slowly and carefully they descended the stairs, and were just crossing the hall on their way out, when an imperious voice commanded them to halt.

There, in the opposite gallery, stood the weird figure of Lady Chillington: her palsied head working awfully, her skinny hands trembling with nervous excitement, and the gems on her fingers scintillating in the lamplight. She was attired in her bridal dress of white satin and lace—a dress which she had not worn for forty-three years. Her black wig was gaily trimmed with flowers and scraps of lace, and in one hand she carried a large bouquet. A foot or two behind her stood Miss Hope.

She had commanded the bearers to halt, and they now stood gazing with wonder on this strange apparition. "In that shell lies the body of my husband, Sir John Chillington," she began, speaking in clear, high-bred tones that could be plainly heard by everyone there. "He died twenty years ago this very day. When he died, there was not even one eye to weep for him, or one heart to mourn for him. All who had known him were glad that they should never see him more. By a most unholy will he devised that his body should be kept unburied for the space of twenty years, and that under whatever roof I might choose to reside he also should there find a resting-place for the time being; the dead and the living were, in fact, to keep each other company all that time. Should I fail in carrying out his commands, the whole of the property left thus conditionally to me, was to pass away to others. I have carried out his commands; but here, to-night, in presence of you strangers, and with my eyes fixed for the last time on that coffin, I say to you, deliberately and solemnly: Would that I had never been born rather than have married that man! Would that I had died on my wedding-day rather than have had children to call him father! Would that I had died on the day that he died rather than have undertaken the burden which his wicked commands laid on my shoulders! I hate myself because I bear his name. I hate this house because it has sheltered him. Take his wretched body away out of my sight for ever!"

The procession moved slowly forward across the hall, and out through the great door. A minute or two later, and hearse and coach set out on their midnight journey through the park. Then the great door was shut and locked by the solemn butler; and the same moment Lady Chillington staggered, and would have fallen to the ground had not Janet sprung forward in time to catch her as she fell.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

### PENMAWR.

Lady Chillington recovered sooner than might have been expected from the fainting fit into which she had fallen just as the hearse containing the body of Sir John Chillington moved away from Deepley Walls. She was very wakeful and restless all night, talking much, sometimes to Janet, sometimes to herself. Soon after daybreak she turned suddenly to Janet.

"I have decided to travel," she said. "A change will do me good. I have been confined to Deepley Walls for so many years that I almost forget what the outside world is like. This Indian summer will last a few days longer, and we will take advantage of it. We will go, in the first place, to North Wales, which I have not visited since I was eighteen. As soon as we are tired of Wales we will set out for London, and after a few days there we will take wing for the South of France and there winter. Yes, we will start at once—this very day. Order my boxes to be packed, and ascertain at what hour this afternoon there is a train that stops at Tydsbury by which we can get on to Chester."

"If your ladyship will allow me to make a suggestion," said Janet.

"I will not allow anything of the kind," answered Lady Chillington.

"Considering the state of your ladyship's health, I think it highly advisable that you see Dr. Jones and obtain his sanction before undertaking so arduous a journey."

"And pray, Mademoiselle Coasseuse, who gave you the power to dictate under this roof? It is mine to command and yours to obey. Carry out the instructions I have given you, and trouble yourself not at all about my health, which was never better than it is this morning."

That night Lady Chillington and Miss Hope slept at Chester. Next morning they took train for Bangor, at which place they designed to stay for a few days.

Lady Chillington's opinion that a change of air would prove beneficial to her seemed to be borne out by the result. It was almost as if she had taken a fresh lease of life. Her appetite improved, her strength increased, her vivacity was unfailing. Day and night Janet was her constant attendant. Had not Janet's constitution been of the best, and had she not been full of energy and spirit, she must have broken down under the ordeal which at this time she had to undergo. Besides having the entire personal charge of Lady Chillington, the whole of the travelling arrangements (they had three servants with them) were under her supervision and control. Each evening she had to furnish her ladyship with a

detailed account of the day's expenditure, and had to be admonished that this charge was excessive, or that one unnecessary, and be querulously scolded if the dinner happened to be bad or the beds uncomfortable; or be asked to explain why she, Lady Chillington, had been dragged to the "Crown Hotel," when anyone with an atom of common sense might have seen that the "Red Lion" over the way would have been both more economical and more comfortable to stay at. Later on came the long, weary readings aloud—readings which were often prolonged till far into the small hours.

To Janet's surprise—although one could hardly be surprised at anything so eccentric a person might choose to do — Lady Chillington brought the Great Hara Diamond with her on her travels. It was a most injudicious thing to do, and much of Janet's time and attention were taken up in seeing that her ladyship neither lost the precious gem nor had it stolen from her. This was a duty that came in a little while to weigh so heavily on Janet that she could not get her thoughts away from the Diamond even when asleep, but would start up in bed fancying she heard stealthy footsteps crossing the floor, or that someone outside was trying the door of her ladyship's room.

In the daytime Lady Chillington carelessly carried the Diamond in a small leather satchel that she wore buckled round her waist. At night it was either laid under her pillow, or else held tightly in her hand while she slept. Once or twice Janet ventured gently to expostulate, but was immediately silenced, and told to keep her observations to herself for the future.

As Lady Chillington told Janet, she had not been in North Wales since she was eighteen years old. Now that she had come back to it in her old age her intention was to revisit each scene that was hallowed in her memory as having been in some way connected with her first visit.

What it was that made this first visit to Wales one of the happiest recollections of an unhappy life, Janet could not quite make out; but that the recollection was a happy one there could be no doubt. Lady Chillington said nothing directly to Janet which would throw any light on the point; but she was continually muttering to herself, with a happy smile on her face, and mentioning the names of the places they had visited, or were about to visit, in connection with the names of people that Janet had never heard of before.

From Bangor they went to several places, some of them on the sea coast, some of them in the interior, but seldom stopping longer than a day in each. One evening, when Janet went to her ladyship to obtain the next day's route, said the latter: "To-morrow we will go to Penmawr. If the place is like what it used to be, the accommodation is limited, consequently the servants may as well await our return here. Order an open carriage for nine to-morrow morning. We shall be one night away."

By a few minutes past nine next morning Lady Chillington and Miss Hope were on their way to Penmawr. The road was a rugged one, winding and ascending through a picturesque and hilly country for nearly a dozen miles. Habitations of any kind were few and far between, and the last mile or two of their journey was through the wildest and most desolate tract of country that Janet had ever seen. Their road lay at the bottom of a narrow valley, but of a valley that stood high above the level of the sea. On both sides they were shut in by grey, precipitous rocks that towered far above them, and which here and there were riven and smitten as if by some terrible throe of Nature in ages long gone by. At length this narrow valley debouched on to a small grassy plateau about a mile in circumference, which, in its turn, was shut in by hills still higher than those which had formed the walls of the valley. At the upper end of this plateau stood a grim, moss-grown old building of considerable size, half farm house, half country inn. At this place they halted, and in answer to Janet's enquiries were told in broken English that they could be accommodated for the night.

Lady Chillington was in high good humour. "This place is changed the least of any that I remember as a girl," she said. "It might only have been yesterday that I was here, for any difference that I can discern. Ah! what a happy time it was. But let us rest and have luncheon, and after that we will go and see the Tarn of Penmawr."

So, when luncheon was over, and her ladyship was sufficiently rested, Janet rang the bell and, as instructed, asked for a guide to the tarn. The guide, who was indeed the landlord of the house, was ready in five minutes, and after waiting till her ladyship was duly shawled for the excursion, they set out, Lady Chillington and Janet being each mounted on a small, sure-footed pony, while the guide trudged along on foot. The road they took was a gloomy and narrow defile that wound precipitously up among the further hills. It was scarcely wide enough for four pedestrians to walk along it shoulder to shoulder. Here and there the rocks on either hand overhung the road, so that a mere ribbon of sky could be seen between them. Here and there the road wound under rude archways that had been hewn out of the rock in years long gone by. The profound silence was broken only by the clatter of their ponies' hoofs on the flinty roadway. Anything so desolate and lonely Janet had never seen. After journeying thus for a mile and a half they reached a small circular opening among the hills, in the middle of which, like a table of black steel, spread the darkling waters of Penmawr.

"You can come for us in an hour," said Lady Chillington to the guide as she and Janet dismounted.

"Give me your arm, child," added her ladyship. Then they walked slowly down to the margin of the tarn, which was set about

with thick coarse rushes, and seated themselves on two large boulders, as round and smooth as if they had been worn by the action of the waves for a thousand years.

The place was wild and desolate in the extreme. On every side it was shut in by great hills—bare, treeless, solemn—giants who for unnumbered ages had stood there with furrowed brows as if guarding the entrance to some holy place.

Janet had brought her sketching apparatus with her, but she sat without attempting to make use of it, overcome by the solemnity of the scene. When Lady Chillington spoke, the interruption was almost a relief.

"I dare say you have wondered, Miss Hope, what can be my motive for dragging you and myself about, with such apparent caprice, during the last fortnight. Not, indeed, that your wonder would be a matter of any moment either to me or to any one else," added her ladyship ungraciously. "And yet my madness, if you like to term it such, has not been without a method. The only idyl with which my life was ever beautified was enacted among the scenes which you and I have lately visited together. And at this spot, at this gloomy Tarn of Penmawr, was enacted the crowning scene of all. On this very spot I first heard the sweet whisper of love, and from one whom I loved passionately in return, although my pride would not let me avow it. Yes, here, by the marge of this Avernian lake, he told me that he loved me, that I was the star of his life, and that if I would only wait for him and promise to be his, he would carve for himself a name and a fortune that I should not be ashamed to share. I was young and handsome then, rich and admired, and I smiled Graham coldly down, although my heart was burning towards him. He went his way and I went mine. He went out as an explorer to the wilds of Africa, and was never heard of more. For me, I married a man rich and well-born, but whom I hated; and I gradually became the—well, the wretched being you see me now."

Her ladyship ceased. What could Janet say—what answer could she make to so strange a confession? Probably none was required. In any case, Janet sat without speaking, gazing with melancholy eyes into the black depths of the tarn. Lady Chillington, too, was silent. Janet glanced at her face. All its lines were fixed and stern. Her eyes seemed bent on the tops of the opposite hills, but they saw nothing unless it were some vision of inner things—some bit of salvage rescued by memory from the wreck-strewn shores of the past.

They sat thus a long time without speaking, and were only disturbed at last by the approach of their guide with the ponies. In silence they rode back to the hotel.

All that evening Lady Chillington's thoughts seemed more abstracted than usual—farther away from the people and things

immediately surrounding her. Still, she seemed cheerful and in good spirits, and after partaking of a light supper, she retired about ten o'clock. Janet sat with her till midnight, reading aloud Beckford's "Vathek." At twelve she was dismissed, and at once went to her own room, which was immediately adjoining that of her ladyship, the door of communication between the two rooms being kept open all night, so that Janet might be within hearing in case she were called.

Janet went off at once into the sound, healthy sleep of the young.

The first grey light of dawn was just penetrating through the blinds when she awoke. The instant she opened her eyes she jumped out of bed, under the vivid impression that Lady Chillington had called her. The well-known tones seemed ringing in her ears as she hurried out of her own room into that of her ladyship.

Without giving a single look round, she at once hurried to the bedside, and drew back the curtain with a gentle hand.

The light as yet was so faint and dim, that for a moment or two she did not realise the fact that the bed was without an occupant. She looked and looked, but no one was there.

Then she gazed round with startled eyes, half expecting to see Lady Chillington sitting in the easy-chair by the window. But she was not in the easy-chair by the window, nor in any of the other chairs, nor in the room at all, as Janet quickly ascertained.

It sent a shock to Janet's heart to see standing wide open the door which led into the corridor, and thence by a flight of stairs to the lower parts of the house.

Whither could her ladyship have gone? and what could be her motive for going at all? That she had been deceived in thinking she had been called, she now felt convinced. It was not the first time she had dreamt such a thing, although the impression had never been stamped so vividly on her brain before.

On instituting a more systematic search, she found that her ladyship must have completely dressed herself before leaving the room. Her bonnet had not been taken, but a grey waterproof cloak with a large hood was missing.

In five minutes from the time of her first awaking, Janet was equipped ready to start in search of Lady Chillington.

Had her ladyship been ten years younger, and in tolerable health, such a vagary could have concerned no one but herself. But she was so old and infirm, so subject to fits of prostration after any sudden excitement, that Janet could not but feel most seriously alarmed by her anaccountable absence. Hurrying downstairs, she found that there were no signs of anyone belonging to the household having yet arisen. But the front door was unfastened and ajar. She opened it and passed out. The morning was brightening rapidly. The tops of the hills stood out clear and sharp against the intense blue of the sky, but here and there the lower spurs were still wrapped in mist. Janet looked anxiously around, but nowhere was there a

soul to be seen. What should she do? Whither should she look for Lady Chillington?

These questions were still in her mind when she heard a heavy footstep descending the stairs inside the house. It was the landlord, their guide of the previous day, who was rising thus early. Janet was on the point of appealing to him, but he spoke first.

"Your mistress must be a queer old lady," he said, with a strong Welsh accent, "to be up this hour of the morning and rambling over the hills all by herself. I saw her a while ago from my bedroom window trotting along as comfortable as possible, and as if she had known the way from a child."

"In which direction was she going?" asked Janet eagerly.

"Why, the road that we went yesterday; the road that leads to Penmawr Tarn."

"Her ladyship is too weak and ill to come back on foot, and alone," said Janet. "I will hasten after her, and do you get out the ponies and follow as quickly as possible. I will engage that you shall be well remunerated for your trouble."

"In that case, miss, I'm at your service. I wont be five minutes behind you. A strange old lady, to be sure!"

Janet hurried off without another word, taking the narrow defile that led to the tarn. She ran with winged feet, and eyes that never swerved from their forward gaze. There was a vague sense of the beauty of the morning upon her, but her brain took in no distinct impressions of the time or the place.

At length she surmounted the last rise in the rocky road, and there before her lay the gloomy valley, peopled with dim shadows and fleecy fragments of mist. There, too, lay the steel-black waters of the lonely tarn.

Janet's eyes, roving eagerly about, rested before long on a dark huddled-up figure close to the margin of the lake. Anyone less sharp-sighted might have taken it for one of the grey boulder stones of which several were scattered about. But Janet was not deceived. She ran forward with a little cry, and stooping over the recumbent figure, tried to raise it in her arms. But she quickly found that this was beyond her strength. Lady Chillington could give her no assistance. She had been stricken with paralysis, and the use of her left side was entirely gone. Janet, however, contrived to raise her ladyship's head and shoulders so that they rested against her knee, and thus she awaited the arrival of the old guide.

"Is that you, child?" said Lady Chillington, in a voice strangely broken and altered, as Janet tried to lift her up. "If it had not been for you I think I should have been dead long ago; but now I know that my time is drawing near."

She spoke again, with her head resting on Janet's knee. "Was it a token that came to me just as day was beginning to break? Or what was it? I cannot tell. I only know that when I woke

up it was with Graham's voice sounding in my ears—I told you about Graham yesterday—as plainly as ever I heard the voice of anyone. I rose and dressed, and still the voice called me, seeming as if it came from a long distance and yet sounding quite close at hand, if you can understand such a thing. These were the words it said: 'Come! come! I am in trouble. You alone can give me ease. Come! and bring with you the Great Hara Diamond.' These words were repeated over and over again, and each time my heart answered back: 'I am coming, dear love, I am coming.' Guided by the sound of the voice, I followed it down the staircase and out of the house, and along the rocky defile until I reached the edge of the tarn. All the way the voice kept close before me, and I followed it without question or doubt. Only to hear those neverforgotten tones was to make me feel young and strong and a girl at heart again. When I reached the edge of the lake, my heart said, although I question whether the words framed themselves aloud on my lips, 'How are you in trouble, Graham? And in what way can I help you?' 'I am a prisoner in the hands of the demon of this lake,' said the voice. 'He will keep me for a thousand years unless I shall be ransomed by one who loves me.' 'I love you, Graham. Tell me how I can ransom you,' I said. Then came the voice. 'Fling into the middle of the lake the rarest thing you have, and I shall be held captive no longer.' Then I knew why I had been told to bring the Great Hara Diamond with me. 'Because of the love I have for you, your bidding shall be done,' I said. With that I kissed the Diamond once for the sake of my dead son, and then I flung it with all my strength into the middle of the tarn. The moment the stone touched the water there fell upon my ear a strain of music so exquisitely sweet and joyful that I felt at once that Graham had been set free. And then I remember nothing more till I felt your arms round me, trying to lift me up."

All this was spoken brokenly and with evident pain.

Janet was much shocked. "Are you sure, dear Lady Chillington. that you really threw the Diamond into the water?" she asked.

"As sure as ever I was of anything in my life," she answered. "Yes, the Diamond is gone, but I do not regret it. Had Graham said, 'Sacrifice your life to set me free,' I should have done it.

At this moment the guide came up with the two ponies. Janet explained to him as much as it was requisite that he should know, Then, between them, and with the aid of one of the ponies, they contrived to carry her ladyship slowly back to the inn. The local doctor was immediately sent for, and Janet despatched a telegram to Chester for the best medical aid that city could afford. Another telegram summoned Major Strickland and Mr. Madgin. The local doctor looked upon Lady Chillington's case as a hopeless one from the first, and the greater authority when he came merely confirmed

that opinion, although they both ageed in thinking she might possibly linger on for several months to come.

But Lady Chillington was saved from that. Her life gradually sank out and died, as a lamp dies, for lack of fuel. She was unconscious before the Major and Mr. Madgin could reach Penmawr, and a few hours later she breathed her last.

Her last conscious words were addressed to Janet. "Child," she said, speaking in a thick, troubled whisper, "I have been unjust to you, and now I regret it. I was too proud to let my love for you be seen, but you have been to me as the apple of my eye. You are my granddaughter, and Deepley Walls will be yours when I am gone. I have been unjust to you—I say it again. Kiss me once, Janet, and tell me that you forgive me. Perhaps we shall meet again where no clouds intervene. Then you will know how truly I have loved you."

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

Mr. Madgin was more like a madman than any reasonable being when Janet told him what had become of the Diamond. His first idea was to have it dived for in the same way that pearl oysters are obtained. But suppose the diver found it and hid it under his tongue, and came to the surface empty-handed? Then Mr. Madgin decided that he would employ a diving-bell, in which he and some man conversant with that peculiar business would go down together, and together they would search the bottom of the lake. But further inquiry elicited the fact that the tarn was far too deep to allow of either of Mr. Madgin's plans being put in operation. The country people averred that it had no bottom, or that if it had a bottom it was at such an extreme depth that no soundings ever taken would succeed in reaching it. This Mr. Madgin declared to be all humbug, and at once proceeded to test the depth of the tarn with such rude appliances as he could command in that out-of-the-way spot. But with all Mr. Madgin's efforts he could not succeed in finding the bottom, and so far the opinion of the country people proved to be correct. But Mr. Madgin was a man not easily defeated. He went up to London, only to reappear at Penmawr three days later with a couple of men and an apparatus nearly similar to that used for taking deep-sea soundings. With this apparatus the bottom of the tarn was at last found, but at a very great depth. After careful soundings over nearly the whole surface, and repeated careful examinations of the greased leaden cup, sent down for the purpose of obtaining specimens of the bottom, the chief of the two men in charge of the apparatus gave it as his opinion that the entire underwater area was thickly covered with large boulders, similar to those which lined the margin of the tarn, and that consequently any small

object which might sink to the bottom would almost be sure to find its way between the interstices of the stones, and would so be lost beyond any possible recovery from above. Reluctantly, and with a sad heart, Mr. Madgin at length gave orders to discontinue an attempt which had become so evidently hopeless. There, in the unsunned depths of the Tarn of Penmawr, the Great Hara Diamond still lies, and will doubtless continue to lie through ages yet unborn, till Time, working through one of his mighty cycles, shall again bring it to light, to shine, perchance, on the breast of some king, the foundations of whose empire are not yet laid, and for whom not even tradition shall have preserved the name of Aurengzebe the Great.

If it was a great surprise to Major Strickland, and such it undoubtedly was, to be told the story of the Hara Diamond, so far as it was known to Mr. Madgin, it was an equal surprise to the latter to find that Miss Hope was Lady Chillington's granddaughter, and the future mistress of Deepley Walls. He had never taken much notice of the quiet, pale young lady whom, since the illness and death of Sister Agnes, he had seen in attendance on Lady Chillington. He had a vague recollection of having been told by someone that Miss Hope was a very distant connection of the family, but as it was a matter that seemed to have no bearing on his interests, he had never troubled himself further about it. But, behold, by one of those kaleidoscopic changes which occur oftener in real life than most people imagine, this mild-eyed young lady had stepped into the position of his mistress, a mistress in whose power it lay to deprive him at one stroke of two-thirds of his income—by severing the connection which had existed for so many years between himself and Deepley Walls. Mr. Madgin was excessively chagrined to think that he had not had sufficient foresight to discern the aureole of coming greatness on the brow of Miss Hope. Like a wise man, he at once determined that nothing should be lacking on his part to make himself an indispensable item of the new *régime*.

Lady Chillington's body was conveyed to Deepley Walls, and there buried—in accordance with her own written request—in the little church at the east end of the park. After the funeral her will was read aloud in the presence of all whom it concerned by Mr. Boulton, the family lawyer. Major Strickland was named as one executor, a certain Dr. Schofield, of London, was the other. With the exception of a few trifling legacies, "My granddaughter, Janet Fairfax, commonly known as Janet Hope," was made sole legatee. In addition to the mansion and estate of Deepley Walls, with sundry farms appertaining thereto, and a considerable quantity of house property in the parish of Eastbury, the income of which in the aggregate amounted to about four thousand pounds a year; in addition to all this, Janet came in for Lady Chillington's accumulated savings during the last twenty years of her life. These savings, which were invested in scrip and shares of various kinds, amounted to the very comfort-

able sum of thirty-five thousand pounds. Janet was placed under the sole guardianship of Major Strickland till she should reach the age of twenty-one. Meanwhile a liberal annual income was set aside for her use.

Deepley Walls, being far too large for Janet's modest requirements, was shut up and left in charge of a couple of trusted servants, with Mr. Madgin to look after the whole. A pretty cottage *ornée* on the banks of the Thames, a few miles from London, was taken, and thither Janet went to live with Major Strickland and Aunt Felicité—a quaint, tender-hearted old lady, whom Janet had long ago learned to love dearly. Captain George Strickland was in lodgings in Bloomsbury, that he might be near the Museum. His "Narrative of Personal Adventure in India" was finished, and on the eve of publication. He was now engaged on a "Treatise on Fortification," and he spent a considerable part of his time in the Museum reading-room. He dined at the cottage once a week; but otherwise its inmates saw little or nothing of him. Janet appreciated his delicacy, knowing well that it was on her account that he was not a more frequent visitor. She said nothing, but bided her time. No word of love had been spoken between Captain George and Janet when the latter was known to the world as a poor dependent of Lady Chillington, although both had felt intuitively how dear they were each to the other, and George had only waited for a favourable opportunity to press his suit. But now that Janet had become a person of wealth and consideration, George's pride fought with his love, and chained it down, and commanded it to be dumb for ever.

In his intercourse with Janet since she had come to live at the cottage, he was the Captain George of old times — but with a difference. His manner towards her was more guarded and ceremonious than of old; there was perhaps a shade more of deference, and just a touch of that quiet coldness which men who are at once proud and shy often put on when they are in the company of those whom they deem their superiors in station. Janet smiled to herself and bided her time.

That time came about four months after Lady Chillington's death. On coming to the cottage one evening, Captain Strickland brought with him the news of his approaching departure from England. In the interests of the book on which he was engaged he was going to visit personally all the great fortifications of Europe. The time was mid-winter, and both his uncle and Janet endeavoured to persuade him to put off his contemplated journey till spring; but George was good-naturedly obdurate and would not give way to their wishes. The Major's sister was not at home that evening, and later on the Major himself was called downstairs on business. Janet and Captain George were left to their own devices. He was seated at the table absently turning over a book of photographs which he had seen a hundred times already; she was seated on an easy-

chair near the fire, toying in an idle mood with a curious Chinese fan. Neither of them spoke for full five minutes after the Major had left the room. Janet was the first to break a silence that was becoming oppressive.

"Then you have really decided to start next week?" she said, looking shyly at Captain Strickland over the top of her fan.

"Yes—really decided," replied George. "I can get no further with my book till I have personally visited the places I wish to describe. Why rest here in idleness, waiting for pleasant weather? My uncle himself would be the first to scorn doing such a thing were the case his own."

Another pause and then another question in a voice hardly above a whisper. "Do you travel alone?"

"Alone? Yes. Where should I find anyone who would care to be my companion on such an erratic tour?"

Another pause. Then shyly but distinctly: "You might ask me to accompany you."

Captain Strickland gave a great start, and a sudden light leapt to his eyes as he turned them on Janet. Her blushing cheeks were hidden by her fan, but over the top of it his eyes met hers, and in them he read something that love interpreted for him aright. In another moment he was on his knees by her side and smothering her hand with kisses.

As Janet afterwards explained to the Major: "You see, George would not propose to me. My money frightened him; so I was obliged to exercise the privilege which Leap Year gives our sex, and propose to him; and when once the ice was broken, I found him not at all shy."

The marriage did not take place till after the expiration of Janet's year of mourning. Then they went abroad, and did not return to England till Janet was turned one-and-twenty. Since that time Deepley Walls has been their home. The Major lives with them, and enjoys a green and hearty old age.

Janet has long known that it was her singular likeness to a younger sister of Lady Chillington, to whom the Major, when a young man, was engaged to be married, that made so deep an impression on the old soldier when he saw her first, and that first endeared her to his heart.

Janet's relatives on her father's side were not slow in making advances to her when they discovered that she was Lady Chillington's heiress. Janet responded graciously enough, but she was not long in discovering that the new circle of connections into which she had been introduced was one in which she should never feel thoroughly at home. It was too worldly and too fast in every way to please Janet's simple tastes. Her new relations would gladly have taken her in hand with the view of educating her up to their standard, and would have found her some horseracing, gambling scion of the house

for a husband. But any such pleasant family arrangement was rendered null and void by the simple fact of Janet choosing a husband for herself in the person of penniless Captain Strickland. Still they could not afford to give Janet up entirely. They find Deepley Walls a convenient visiting house during the dull season, and bashfulness being a quality unknown to any of the tribe, they do not fail, when there, to make themselves thoroughly at home. Janet bears the infliction with much sweetness. She says that you cannot have aristocratic connections without paying for the privilege in one shape or another. It is scarcely necessary to state that Mr. Madgin's position at Deepley Walls was in nowise affected by the death of Lady Chillington. Janet is too fond of the old man to curtail even one of his privileges or emoluments; nor does she forget his great services in connection with the recovery of the Diamond. Neither Mr. Madgin nor Captain Strickland has ever ventured to tell Janet that the man who stole the Diamond from M. Platzoff, and from whom it was afterwards recovered by means of a clever ruse, was none other than her own father. That is a passage of family history of which she still remains happily ignorant.

Madgin Junior is rising in his profession. He has a lucrative engagement at one of the West-end theatres. His rendering of the character of Doxy in the grand sensation drama of "From Belgravia to Newgate" was highly spoken of by the press, and vociferously applauded by the pit. Madgin Junior being of a sanguine temperament, sees no reason why he should not in the course of time develop into a "star" of the first magnitude.

Mirpah the superb still remains unmarried, and will in all probability so remain till the end of the chapter. Several individuals have expressed a desire to take her for better or worse; but in each case Mirpah seemed to see the "worse" so clearly, and the "better" so indistinctly, that she declined the offers one and all. It is probable that no one so nearly touched her heart as Captain Ducie.

"Only think," she will sometimes say to her father, "had I been so minded, I might now have been stepmother to the present mistress of Deepley Walls!"

She still keeps her father's books and accounts, and as years creep over Mr. Madgin, so do Mirpah's labours increase. In those labours and in the hoarding of money, Mirpah Madgin, to all appearance, finds the great happiness of her life.

Lady Chillington did not forget Sergeant Nicholas in her will. A comfortable annuity was settled on the old man. He resides in Eastbury, and not infrequently of an evening goes to smoke a pipe with Mr. Madgin. At these meetings we may be certain that over and over again, in all its details, one or the other of them often tells the strange story of the Great Hara Diamond.

THE END.

# THE ADVENTURES OF A GUINEA-PIG.

By C. J. Langston.

I AM not one of those little, bright-eyed animals which, if you hold it up by the tail the eyes will drop out, and which, alas, is singled out for the horrors of vivisection, or the extraction of lymph; neither do I answer to a director's fee, nor a financial metaphor. No, I am a prosaic biped, given to wandering in many pastures, especially on the Sunday; and even Mrs. Grundy will not object when madame hears that I supply the place of the absent minister at the parish church. In that sense I am what is called a guinea-pig, and, as the Baconian proverb suggests, I go the whole hog. My experiences are various in an age of infinite variety in Ritual, and my endeavours to adapt myself to the requirements of High, Low and Broad Church are not without a humorous aspect.

When I was ordained, and long afterwards, no one thought of preaching in a surplice; and I well remember being piloted by a venerable verger, bearing an Aaronic wand, from the vestry to the pulpit stairs, arrayed in a Geneva gown so ample that its folds would persist in catching at every projecting angle and pulling me back with a jerk. Just before the public presentation of a new one, my dear incumbent lent me his own precious silk gown to parade the town with the Corporation at the laying of the foundation stone of the Town Hall, when some ladies remarked that it was time they gave the Curate a new gown, for they observed that the one he wore in the street was very shabby. "Why, I only bought it last year," exclaimed my incumbent reproachfully.

But now black gowns, like white bands, are forbidden in church, and we have to unsex ourselves in mediæval cassocks and short surplices that require a header and will hang fire down the back, with the uncomfortable reflection that one must half unrobe to get at a handkerchief or a threepenny bit. Lately, I was in a dilemma before morning service in a retired church among the Quantock Hills. There had been a funeral the previous afternoon, and in the dim light of December, the clergyman had inadvertently enclosed the edge of the surplice in shutting the iron chest containing the registers. The chest was locked, the key one mile distant at the Rectory, and the time nearly up; I coaxed and tugged at the imprisoned garment, but Chubb was obdurate and would only grant a release on retaining half an inch of the border. In truth, it was a lonely spot, and when we drove up to the palatial Rectory, whereon the sun never shone, lying as it does within the enduring shadow of overhanging hills of pine and frowning yews and monster bracken, the Switzerland of Somerset, methought it was indeed a "place where no man comes,

nor hath been since the making of the world." Cold, too, within and without; I recall the long, chilly drive from the station, the more than chilly fire which awaited in my bedroom, consisting of two green sticks crossed, with the scalding sap hissing at the ends, and the vain effort to make a blaze. The stately rooms, hung with grim portraits whose

"Souls were looking through their painted eyes with awful speculation."

Their world is not our world, but a misty memory of high-backed chairs and getting up by candle light, and other nightmares of the dark ages.

Here, as elsewhere, the celebration had changed from a reverent reality to a vain repetition; and each Sunday morning I waited with anxiety a couple of nods from a lady before knowing whether there were any communicants into whose hands the cup was not given. I may add that so diverse is the custom that I have now been called upon to celebrate at every side of the holy table, save the South. My perplexity arose from a different cause in the quaint little church of Ston-Easton, where nothing had been altered since the days of good Queen Anne. In the square seats, the different grades of society were indicated by wooden steps and red curtains, and the people faced all ways. The morning service over, I could not see whether any remained in the huge wooden boxes for the celebration, and I was just leaving the chancel when the prolonged silence brought several bonnets to the surface and relieved my perplexity.

"Sur," said the clerk in the evening, when I was squeezed in the coal-hole that served for a vestry, "you'll foind a candle wrapt up in pairpur under the Bible if you wants more loight."

I did want more light, but the idea of stopping during service to light a proverbially damp wick, and then to hold the naked candle—for there was no second candlestick—was too absurd. The service over, I was interested in watching from the pulpit the devotional attitude of the solitary occupant of the Squire's pew, who knelt on the seat, and buried his head in his hat, quite oblivious of the departing congregation. When I was thinking what had so deeply moved him, all serious sentiment was dispelled by the discovery that he was merely trying with refractory matches to light his lantern in that draughty corner.

Speaking of lights reminds me how often in rural districts, at the evening service, the pulpit is lighted by a solitary paraffin lamp, kept down to a twinkle, perhaps for economy, during the prayers. A friend of mine, nervous and short-sighted, turned with trembling hand the glimmering wick, and turned it out. He felt like Thackeray, before delivering the first of his lectures on the Georges. Loosed from the moorings of his manuscript, he wandered over a troubled sea of texts and fine old crusted platitudes, thinking every moment that the clerk would come to the rescue. But, said that rustic afterwards :—

"I thout as how he doused the glim a purpus, as a wanted to preach extrumpery loike."

What gave piquancy to the anecdote was that the concluding hymn commenced, "Lead kindly light amid the encircling gloom."

On the other hand, at Claverton, near Bath, a parish once lifted from obscurity by the rectorship of the poet Graves, and containing the tomb of Ralph Allen, the "Squire Allworthy" of "Tom Jones," I was disturbed by the crackle and splutter of a lamp, expiring from want of oil, and the effluvium was positively poisonous. There's nothing like the old-fashioned candles after all; at least, so I thought at East Quantoxhead, late in September, when, having received no directions from the absent Rector to alter the hour, service began at half past six without any provision for lighting; and I scarcely suppose that a light had been seen in the building during the seventy-one years' reign of the previous Rector—the locally well-known A. F. Luttrell. I carried a small lamp up to the church, and it was fixed, with economic propriety, over the reading desk, below the cornice of a remarkably fine fifteenth century pulpit, whose monkish images stared aghast at such fiery intrusion. The other little lamp looked like a glow-worm on the harmonium. Before the prayers ended mine was the only face visible: all others had passed into deep shadow, indistinct as the phantoms they will shortly become. Happening to place my hand on the pulpit ledge at the close of the sermon, I found the woodwork burning hot, being just over the lamp chimney. Another five minutes and the monkish images would be in purgatory. Happily, darkness prevented the last hymn, and the venerable pulpit was saved.

I am not, unfortunately, musical, and often have reason to exclaim with Swift:—

> Strange that such difference should be
> 'Twixt tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee!

Not quite so dense as a former parishioner, a retired contractor living at Matlock, when first he entertained the excellent local band, which concluded with the National Anthem.

"That's a pretty thing," said he. "What is it? Play it o'er again."

In the primitive time of my ordination, to read the service in an audible voice, "understanded of the people," seemed all that was required; and without following the instructions of Garrick to a young curate, that, during the Litany, he should look up beseechingly, roll his eyes, and occasionally lower his voice to a tearful whisper, I venture to think that a little attention to the modulation and inflection of the voice would not be out of place. But I forget: we do not read now: we are requested to "say" the service. The term "reading desk" is obsolete: it is "the prayer desk": and we must render the Litany from a faldstool, facing due East. I remember my anxiety at dear old Chewton Mendip, when, upon moving to this stool of

repentance, I found the Litany had been duly set to music; and I had to trace the words amid a maze of semi-quavers, being relieved, when turning over each leaf, if I reached the opening line without a pause. In fact, a highly ornate musical service may have charms to soothe the savage breast, but to the non-musical minister it is beset with pitfalls. How often do I begin the service, not knowing what portions will be said or sung in these changeful times. In my simplicity I repeat the Lord's Prayer, and the choir drowns my voice. I commence the Creed, and I am shouted down. I respond in the Versicles; and, oh!

"What a gush of euphony voluminously wells!"

At one place I am requested to conduct the service in G. Who or what is G? Treble X would be more intelligible. Surely, I thought, it will be a case of Gee-woe! Quoth the organist, as an encouragement, "It will be all right. I will give the note." My response was evidently not a note of admiration; for I found it somewhat difficult to prevent the voice running along the gamut of my vocal organism. "At any rate," said another incumbent, "you can monotone." I felt like Artemus Ward when asked to sing:—"Oh! of course; but I never tried." To keep the voice attuned to one key for an hour is a trying experiment; and, doubtless, I strayed into *de profundis* when I ought to have been *in excelsis*. However, a musical ear is not always an advantage, or my friend, the Vicar of P——, would not have forgotten a customary observance.

"My dear," exclaimed his wife after service, "why on earth did you not give out the notices? Now I shall have the club people coming the day I must be away."

"Notices—what notices? Oh! I see. How could I possibly remember anything when that fellow James was actually singing a note below the others the whole time?"

"Screeched all the trebles here,
Boggled the tenors there,
Raising the parson's hair,
While his mind wandered:
Theirs not to reason why
This psalm was pitched too high;
Theirs but to gasp and cry
Out the Old Hundred."

An instance of super-sensitiveness in another direction occurred to me last year when taking duty for an invalid curate,

"Gifted with the miraculous powers
Of getting up all sorts of hours;"

partly turning night into day, and rendering conventional domesticity perplexing.

The tiny parish, where one might touch from the rectory all the

people with a toasting-fork, was three miles distant; and my genial host gave me this parting injunction: "The rector, who never takes any part in the service, is kindness itself, but so peculiarly sensitive that your sermon must not admit of any application, or he will think it is meant for him, and grieve in secret; and be sure don't sneeze, or he will declare that he has given you cold." This was charming, as I had begun to sneeze before breakfast.

I found Mr. and Mrs.— all kindness and hospitality; and the rectory so close to the little church that I robed in the study; and the usual procession on this, the first Sunday in the month, started thus:— The officiating minister, in canonicals (generally blown over his head by a stiff breeze), carrying a decanter of port wine—the clerk being too bibulous to be trusted. Next came the worthy Rector, bearing a huge air-cushion for his rheumatic wife, who was blown along by slow and easy stages, and brought up the rear. The venerable clerk, tugging at the bell-rope, with one eye fixed in a chink of the belfry door, which he jerked open as the sedate trio approached; and, when the decanter was being borne up the aisle, the harmonium sounded, and the service began. It was a quaint church, with memorials to forgotten families, and traces of former importance. The congregation numbered nine; and the idea of a formal sermon which *had* an application, was out of the question. During the singing of the second hymn I decided to preach extempore; but I must be brief; and yet, when I placed my watch on the edge of the pulpit, it kept sliding down towards the floor. Ah, the use of little things! That solitary pin stuck in the waistcoat relieved my anxiety. Ere the hymn concluded I had driven this pin firmly into the ledge with a key, and slipt the ring of my watch over it, and managed for fifteen minutes to interest the Nine Muses without, I trust, any discordant note or uneasy reflection.

Several times during dinner I felt a tingling sensation at the nose, and thought, Now I am in for it—sneeze I must; but it passed off, and it was only on the last occasion that a crumb went the wrong way, and caused me to cough violently.

"Ah!" said my kindly host, "I knew that I should give you a cold."

Speaking of colds, can I ever forget the bitter Saturday night of January 28th, 1888, when, leaving my own snug fireside, I was jerked by a market train to the village of D——, some twelve miles up the line. The reference of Shenstone to "one's warmest welcome at an inn" could scarcely apply to the "Arms" of a defunct grandee, whose embrace was anything but invigorating. A low, marshy piece of land, with frozen pools adjoining a sluggish canal, and deserted brick kilns; here and there a row of hovels, mean and squalid, leaning all ways, as if the half-burnt clay were eager to return to its mother earth; and in the midst, as a whitened sepulchre, seamed with damp, stood "The —— Arms," where I was to spend the night.

Suffering from a severe cold, I had written for a fire in my bedroom; but, alas! there was no such thing as a fireplace upstairs; and when I left the little bar parlour, simmering from unusual heat, I passed into an Arctic region, where the frost on the window pane never melted with the noon-day sun, and the counterpane was clammy with perpetual chilliness, and the wall-paper curled over in rolls, revealing a surface of broken plaster, swollen with green veins of damp. Oh, for the comforts of home! With a praiseworthy intention of thawing the air, a large paraffin lamp had been lighted on the dressing-table, the fumes of which were so sickening that, like the late Lord Derby, I preferred the complaint to the remedy, and at once extinguished it. Wrapping myself in the blankets, I passed the dark hours in coughing and turning over, until

"The casement slowly grows a glimmering square,"

when I was relieved to be "called to the bar," and to feel my nose and fingers by a roaring fire. A walk of two miles brought me to the stately church of L——, where the choir having outgrown the vestry, I felt like a sandwich man between burly choristers, and could only avoid the thrust of sinewy arms when the head was buried in a surplice, by flattening myself against the wall.

Following the procession, I entered the reading-desk, and, when about to commence the service, found only an old Bible turned upside down. Meanwhile, I could see choristers nudging each other, and hear:

"Go and tell him, Bill!"

"No you goo."

And there came a too audible whisper: "He don't use the desk now, but sits up in the chancel."

I also took the wrong place on the following Easter day at Minehead. Having assisted at an early celebration in the well-filled district church, the worthy curate read the prayers at the eleven o'clock service at the parish church; and when leaving the vestry I asked, "Where shall I sit?"

"In the same position you did before breakfast."

Therefore, I took possession of a state chair within the chancel rails, but could see no provision for kneeling and no prayer book. The old clerk, noticing my dilemma, seized, with benevolent eagerness, the book nearest at hand, which he presented. Alas! it was a ponderous service-book, weighing nine pounds at least; and I was sorely punished by having to hold this huge tome with both hands for nearly an hour, and kneel on glazed tiles until I seemed on the rack.

"I meant," apologised my clerical colleague afterwards, "you to sit in the stall opposite to me."

I have heard amusing parentheses in the old times at Wixford Church, when the venerable Rector, Hugh Carleton, most courteous of men, during the sermon would exclaim without pause:—

"My dear brethren, if you continue in that course there will be peace, and——" (leaning over to his footman) "Thomas, please to shut the chancel window." Later on: "Let me entreat you to remember this important truth——" (shaking his head at the young delinquent) "Joseph Bayzand, can't you sit still?"

This can be matched by the remembrance of my schoolfellow, Lythal, whose square family pew adjoined the reading desk at R——. During the reading of the Psalms young Lythal, lounging just below, would receive an admonitory thump from his pastor, with the hoarse whisper: "Sit up; you stoop as bad as your grandpa."

More amusing is the account of a recent Harvest Thanksgiving at an obscure parish, related to me by the special preacher on that occasion. The Vicar, an eccentric old gentleman, had married the rustic schoolmistress, partly, as he said, to be sure of someone to preside at the harmonium: but I fear this was the only harmony between May and December. There was a primitive simplicity about the decorations truly charming. The pulpit was festooned with bunches of turnips and carrots, and branches of sloe to imitate hot house grapes. Small clusters of apples, so suggestive of three-a-penny, dangled in front of traceried windows, on the sills of which stood flower-pots, each containing a group of dahlias, fuchsias and marigolds, crowned by bulrushes, wonderful to behold. A pyramidical erection, the Vicar's own handiwork, graced the communion table, consisting of a layer of huge pumpkins, overlaid by vegetable marrows; then came strata of kidney potatoes, French beans and beetroot, the whole crowned by a large loaf. At each corner stood willow-pattern plates, containing a choice assortment of plums, peaches, English figs and quinces; whilst a row of what are called "cow cabbages" ornamented the chancel steps.

Service was at 7.30 to oblige the labourers, and the small congregation was supplemented by a few strangers. An anthem had been proposed; but, as the three young men-minstrels had struck because the solo had been offered to the only female of the party, that had to be given up, and the hymns were sung by the school-children.

"Then," said my friend, "I could hardly preserve my gravity. The harmonium being placed close to where I was sitting, the old Vicar would glide to the presiding genius, and, ducking his head behind the red curtain, would say in undertone:

"A little faster, my dear Peggy."

The red curtain was violently agitated, then a muttered protest and a quick return to the reading desk.

Presently the dulcet melody charmed him back. "I say, my dear, my love, Mrs. Major C. is here; now do try your best."

Slowly and distinctly came the response. "Mister R., do *your* dooty and leave me to *mine*, I beg."

There were no happy returns after that.

Owing to an accident some years ago, I am very nervous when

driven, and in accepting duty I always add, "Kindly send a four-wheel and a very quiet horse." This proviso brought me a little quiet chaffing from a specimen of that nearly extinct species—a sporting parson; and as the kindly gentleman has since retired to more congenial pastures, I believe he will only laugh with me at these particulars. Arriving at the chief station in Cirencester on the bleak Christmas Eve of 1887, there was no one to meet me, and after waiting and walking about the ancient town for two hours, my anxiety was relieved by the answer to my enquiry at the principal hotel:

"Mr. G., sir; oh, yessir: been here all the afternoon."

I entered the coffee-room, greeting the only occupant, a lady.

"Not Mrs. G., but Mrs. G.'s sister; he will be here directly."

Enter a stout gentleman, in a short cut-away coat, brown plaid trousers and a red tie. He beamed with good nature. I knew that I should like him.

"The Rector of O——?"

"Ah, yes; have a glass of sherry. I was amused at your post script."

"Well; have you a quiet horse?"

"Ha, hum!" stroking his chin; "the horses are outside."

The lady and I followed the Rector, and I saw a pair of thoroughbred horses attached to a high park phaeton. Although urged to get up in front, I preferred riding with the coachman behind, and by resting one foot on the wheel and the other on a narrow step level with the seat, I climbed into the kind of box described by Dickens, and the horses started. They needed no whip and were thoroughly under control; but my host, playing upon my fears and inspirited possibly by that last glass of sherry, never ceased lashing and urging the animals. The moon was at the full, and we were whirled along so rapidly that I never saw the spokes of the wheels until we finished the seven miles' journey in half-an-hour, when I felt intensely relieved to let myself down with my hands from that unapproachable seat in the wooden box, and was shortly met on the staircase by G., holding a decanter and a glass.

"Have a glass of sherry; I always do after a drive."

He then confided to me that there had been a slight difference of opinion between him and his bishop respecting the propriety of knocking a fellow down, and that he was off to spend Christmas in the Principality. When I heard the retreating wheels at midnight, I felt thankful to be safe up two pairs of stairs.

"Have no fear about going back to the station," said ever kindly Mrs. G.; "the man shall take you in the low village cart, with the quiet old pony, which even the children drive."

Therefore my visit was not allayed by any misgiving, and I had a thoroughly pleasant Christmas Day, although nearly reduced to Swift's greeting of "dearly beloved Roger" in the quaint little church. Just as at Beaworthy Church last October, the morning

service was attended by three persons: the Rector, the Rector's servant and the assistant overseer.

Perhaps the bells reminded me of "old familiar faces" long blotted out from the canvas, and cheerful greetings on the great Birthday, and now—eating the bread of strangers. Ah! it is all in the volume of life; and I am sure that little family party at O—— Rectory, with those loving children on my knees, too, drove away sad thoughts.

Next morning, waving my adieux to the little ones at the hall door, I took my seat in the village cart, when, lo! I found myself all on the slant, at an angle of forty-five degrees.

"Dear me!" I exclaimed, looking round and seeing an immense horse; "surely this is not the old pony."

"Well, no, sir," said the coachman, touching his hat. "I didn't like to tell missis, the pony's lame; and as Tippo hadn't bin out for three weeks and wanted exercise, I thought we'd put him in the cart."

Good gracious! how my heart throbbed as the stable boy let go the horse's head and we rushed down narrow lanes at a pace positively sickening; Tippo, in fact, had bolted, and the driver could only steer clear of roadmen's barrows and deftly turn corners; whilst it took all my time to retain my sloping seat and receding bag. Fortunately we met nothing, and a hill near Kemble station brought Tippo into subjection. "Take, O boatman, thrice thy fee!" such was my feeling upon alighting, as I gratified Jehu and saved my neck, but I gave him a word of warning, and then, Oh the luxury of the train.

One month later came another summons to O——. Remembering recent experience, I wrote "Do not send anything to meet me, for I am determined to walk from Kemble Station."

In my terror, I had taken no notice of the road; therefore, upon leaving the train I asked Master Velveteen, who replied "Take the first turn to the right, and it's three mile and easy enough to find."

But the lad omitted to mention that I must first cross the line. Consequently, when leaving the station yard, I turned into a wide road bordered by trees, but uncommonly lonely. The frost had just broken, and the moon being obscured by clouds, I could not see the puddles and mire and got splashed from head to foot. Those who know the peculiar adhesiveness of the white mud of the district can imagine my pickle. Again I enquired whether this was right for O——, but the wayfarer answered almost in the words of Northumberland, in "Richard II.":—

> "Believe me, noble lord, I am a stranger here in Gloucestershire."

The road became more lonely, not even a house for two miles, till beneath an unfinished railway arch, I saw a momentary glimmer. Alas! it was only a "sturdy vagrant" lighting his pipe; and I thought as I hurried on, what an easy prey I might be. At length,

in the distance appeared the lights of Cirencester, and at the junction of three roads, a rambling tenement, once an inn, lay in the shadow of gloomy pines; and here I learnt that I must retrace my steps three miles, to Kemble station, and another three would bring me to O——. Fortunately I was then strong, yet I could further exclaim with the Duke:—

> "These high, wild hills and rough, uneven ways
> Draw out our miles and make them wearisome."

Instead of dinner at the Rectory at six o'clock, I arrived at eight, bespattered, heated and exhausted; being met at the entrance by my hospitable friends who declared that they would never again let me walk from the station.

I recounted the misadventure in my host's study, where, instead of the usual decorous display of Churchman's Almanacks, Oxford frames and illuminated texts, the walls were adorned with the trophies of the chase and a graphic representation of the latest prize-fight.

Said the Rector on the morrow: "I will read prayers for you to-night."

The resonance of his powerful voice in the small church precluded distinct hearing, and he rushed through the prayers at a pace that no one could overtake.

After service I said, "You ought to be handicapped."

"Well, I believe I am a bit fast for the old women."

"Your voice would fill a cathedral."

"So my Vicar thought in my last Curacy. When I was marrying a couple of friends in my usual style, he had been asked to assist, and whispered over my shoulder, 'Good gracious, G., don't blow their heads off.'"

A word in conclusion respecting Parish Clerks.

However much disposed to revere the adage "Let ancient customs prevail," my experience of this nearly obsolete official often suggests the thought that he has been selected either for what Goethe describes as the "energy of ignorance," or for some superior solidity of skull. When repeatedly taking duty in the grand old church of W——, in Kent, years ago, the venerable clerk, deaf, stolid, taciturn, invariably planted himself as far from me as he could in the spacious vestry. If I approached, he retired; if I asked a question about the service, he remained immovable, or started with an emphatic exclamation of surprise—"Surr!"—as if I had offered personal indignity. Like the famous nobleman, he shook his head, and that passed for wisdom. To make him hear would be to enlighten half the expectant congregation. He sat below me in the three decker, and my anxiety was to keep in front in the creeds and responses. In vain I ask: Does the Vicar use a collect before the sermon? Does he give the blessing from the pulpit? Does the collection include all the congregation, or communicants only? The old answer comes —"I can't remember!"

The other morning, at B——, I was mortified by utter neglect. There was to be a baptism immediately after the shortened service commemorative of St. Peter, therefore one would naturally rely upon all things being in readiness. A lady sponsor told me before I left the vestry that the party might be expected immediately; and in accordance with ecclesiastical propriety it was decided that the rite be administered after the lesson. But how could I be sure that the party had arrived? Where was the clerk who had promised to be in attendance?—right away up in the tower ringing the bell. When it stops he will surely come. Oh no, he did not mean to stop till I was in the reading desk. The Baptistry was at the extreme end of the long church. I could not well inspect the font before service, so I commenced the prayers, trusting that all would be well. My last hope that the baby would not arrive till after the ordinary service was dispelled by the loudest of infantine ejaculations—short, sharp, terrific. Leaving the lectern, I walked demurely to the font, followed by the christening party, and the congregation faced right about. Timidly I peeped over the rim. Alas! the bottom was dry. "Try there," whispered lady-sponsor number two, pointing to a green bucket close by. Again, never a drop: even the bottle in the vestry had been removed. A gentleman went outside in quest of the clerk. For fully five minutes there was an awful pause: then he returned with "He is coming," and the baptism began amid spasmodic squalls. I was relieved when the ceremony was over.

Parish clerks are becoming scarce: I am inclined to think their office "more honoured in the breach than the observance," and I conclude with a remarkable epitaph to one of them, Peter Izod, at Crayford, in Kent:—

"The life of this clerk was just three score and ten,
During half of which time he had sung out amen.
He married when young like other young men;
His wife died one day, so he chaunted amen.
A second he took; she departed—what then?
He married and buried a third with amen.
Thus his joys and his sorrows were trebled; but then
His voice was deep bass as he chaunted amen.
On the horn he could blow as well as most men;
But his horn was exalted in blowing amen.
He lost all his wind after three score and ten;
And here with three wives he waits till again
The trumpet shall rouse him to sing out amen."

# TWO PHASES IN THE LIFE OF AN ONLY CHILD.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

## I.

ON the outskirts of a handsome village situated many miles' distance from the Metropolis, stands a somewhat small but charming villa. Nothing about it, inside or out, would seem to be wanting that could contribute to the comfort of its inmates; for if the pleasure-grounds were limited, they were luxuriant; if the conservatories were small, all that was choice and lovely in the florist's calendar had a place there; and if the villa's apartments were neither stately nor numerous, there was at least sufficient space, and also elegance about them, to satisfy all reasonable desires.

The bleak winter had passed; the early spring had come and gone; and now that May was entering, the lately bare trees were budding forth into beauty, the garden flowers upraised their lovely heads, the lawn was clothed in its brightest and freshest tint of green; and on that glowing spring morning there came dancing on to the lawn, from one of the low French windows of the breakfast-room, an exquisite child of seven years old, bright and radiant as that sunny day.

Few could look for the first time at that young face without being riveted with its singular beauty. Yet it was not so much in the features, faultless as they were, that the attraction lay; or in the complexion, though it rivalled the loveliest rose; or in the sunny ringlets sporting on the neck, as in the deep, earnest, *spirituel* expression of the face. A singular face indeed; singular in its depth of pathos and beauty; and rarely have the gifts of nature, both in mind and person, been lavished upon a child of earth as they were lavished upon Georgina Vereker.

She was gaily dressed in white, with a blue sash tied round her waist, its long ends fluttering with her restless movements; and her straw hat hung dangling from her arm by its blue ribbons, for she had raced out of doors in joyous impatience, too eager to wait for its being put on. Flying hither and thither; now stopping to listen to the birds as they carolled in the trees, now stooping to pluck a rare flower, or inhale the perfume from a newly-blown rose, now practising some dancing-step, and now glancing down at the dew gathered on her sandaled shoes.

"My dear," cried a staid, but young and pleasing-looking lady, who had followed her out, "the grass is not yet dry. You must come upon the gravel."

"The grass will not hurt me," returned the child, skipping about it more than ever. "And I can't see mamma's windows from the gravel. I want to have the first look at her when she comes to open them."

One of the windows the child was looking up to did open as she

spoke, for a lady, attracted probably by the voices, drew aside the curtains and threw up the sash.

"My May-bird! my May-bird!" she exclaimed, fondly looking down at the little girl.

"Dear mamma! dear mamma! see what a lovely day it is. And I have a white frock on—you said I might put one on for the first time, if it were warm and sunny. Shall I come to you now, that you may wish me many happy returns of my birthday?"

"Yes, yes, my darling. Come."

Away flew the child, brushing past her governess, on her way to her mother's bedroom. The lady had not begun to dress; she was merely in her dressing-gown and slippers. She extended her arms as the child entered, clasping her fondly in them: she passionately kissed her smooth, glowing cheeks; her open brow; her rosy lips; and as she laid her hand upon the little head, and looked up to heaven, the tears gathered in her eyes with the earnestness of her aspiration:

"Almighty Father! bless, oh bless my child! Protect and bless her through this approaching year that she is entering upon, even as Thou hast blessed and protected her through the last!"

Is it well to be an only child?—the only child of doting parents? I scarcely think so. Mr. and Mrs. Vereker had married late in life: he was turned fifty, and she fast approaching it. It may be, they had not expected children; that they thought the time was gone by for the blessing to be accorded them; and when a child was indeed born, they looked upon it as the most precious of all precious gifts; had it been a very angel from heaven, its little presence could not have diffused more joy and gladness, or have given rise to greater thanksgiving. It grew and thrived—in spite of the overwhelming care that was bestowed upon it. Every breath was watched—every sigh was listened to with nervous anxiety; and when it screamed, for the very best of babies will scream, the whole house rose in commotion, and the nearest medical man was sent for. How Mrs. Vereker survived the "painful period of dentition," as the soothing syrup advertisements express it, was a mystery. Mr. Vereker was in a state of nervousness from its commencement to its close; his wife never quitted the nursery or the infant for weeks and months, and all the rules and daily ordinary regulations of the household were thrown aside. Mrs. Vereker took her breakfast standing, tea-cup in hand, and looking at the baby; Mr. Vereker how and where he could get it: dinner was forgotten to be ordered; and bed-time only remembered by the child's sinking into a quiet slumber. Still the child grew and prospered; and by the time she was two years old, her will was law in the house. No child was ever so indulged and cared for; and perhaps for those doting parents there was some excuse, for she was a very angel in beauty and temper. A looker-on could not but recall some of the lines in Parnell's "Hermit." I have not the poem to refer to, and have never seen it since I was a child, but the reader

will recollect what I mean. Where a child is born to the good, religious man, who had been walking straight for heaven before, but now

> ——— the child half-weaned his heart from God.
> Child of his age! for him he lived in pain,
> And measured back his steps to earth again.

Was Mr. Vereker acquainted with that poem? And did a following line ever recur to him?

> And God, to save the father, took the son.

Did he fear the same All-seeing Wisdom, the same termination, might rule over this earthly and inordinate love of his?

But no. Mr. Vereker was not, himself, spared long, either to love or to mourn his child. Ere she was three years old, he died; and his last prayers on earth were for her happiness, his last thoughts for her welfare. The whole of his fortune—and it was considerable—was left to Georgina. Half of it to be paid over to her, *unconditionally*, on her wedding-day, or when she should be twenty-one; the other half on the death of his wife: but during the child's infancy and youth, Mrs. Vereker was to enjoy the interest of the whole. Was there wisdom in this will—as regarded the child's temporal happiness? Mr. Vereker no doubt thought so.

An only child of a widowed mother! and she long past her meridian of life! never hoping for another—knowing that another could never be born to her. The reader may have witnessed a parallel case in some of the daily scenes around him; but I question if he ever saw or heard of a passion so idolatrous in one human being for another as Mrs. Vereker felt and encouraged for her little daughter. Every indulgence, every expense, every care was lavished upon her. She had never heard the voice of contradiction. Almost any other, in her place, would have become a household tyrant, unbearable to the servants, and a source of perpetual torment to herself and her mother; but, happily for them both, the child was gifted with the sweetest temper, with expansive intellect, and with the most sensitive imagination, far, far beyond her years.

"Those children never live," cried an incautious, gossiping friend one day, looking at Georgina as she knelt, weaving daisies on the lawn. "They are too good and too beautiful for earth, and God takes them to their fitting home."

The visitor thought she spoke to the governess alone, but Mrs. Vereker had joined them unperceived. The life-blood left her heart as she listened to the words, rushing back to it with tumultuous agony; a cold, shivering moisture attacked her, and her sight momentarily left her. Perhaps the thought had never before fully occurred to her that her child *might* be taken from her: that it was really subject to the common doom of its fellow-mortals—death. But she looked at the lovely picture kneeling on the grass, on her glowing colour, and round, healthy form.

"Death is not likely to come to *her* before its time," she mentally exclaimed, drawing a relieved sigh. "Mrs. Grame is always revelling in old wives' tales."

And so the child, worshipped by her mother, loved by her governess, doted on by the servants, reached her seventh birthday, the 1st of May, and was now in her mother's room, listening to the fervent prayer for blessings to descend upon her head. Her birthdays were always kept, and with much splendour. To-day, a large party, chiefly children like herself, were to assemble to a mid-day dinner, and all sorts of merry games were to take place on the lawn afterwards, with dancing indoors in the evening.

"But what shall I do till then?" asked Georgina, when breakfast was over and she had fully examined all her birthday presents. Of course she learnt no lessons that day.

"What would you like to do, dearest?" questioned her mother. "Shall I order the carriage and take you out?"

"The carriage," hesitated the child, apparently deliberating within herself the *pros* and *cons* of the proposition. "No, mamma," she said, at length, "I don't think we will have the carriage to-day. I am so delighted with everything! with my birthday, and my presents, and all my visitors coming, that I should not like to sit still in the carriage. I must dance about for joy. What are you going to do, Miss Harding?"

"I have one or two commissions to execute in the village," replied the governess.

"Then I will go with you," added the child. "Mamma, I shall put on my new birthday bonnet."

No objection was made. When was an objection ever made to the will of Georgina? So the birthday bonnet—it was all white satin and feathers—was put on, and Miss Vereker started on her walk with her governess.

She was really like a bird, happy and light and joyous as one. Now singing a scrap of a song; now flying after a butterfly—one of the first of the year; now plucking a hedge flower; now skipping over the pasture grass; and now talking, strange, deep thoughts, as she always did, to Miss Harding. Never was there so sweet and sunny a child—never one so imaginative.

As they neared the lodge at the gates, where dwelt the gardener and his wife, she sprang, as usual, up to the door, in quest of her old friend Willy, a pretty boy about her own age.

"Where's Willy?" she asked of the wife, who was busy in the room over her domestic duties.

"Ah, my dear young lady, is it you? Many happy returns of the day, my sweetest. And oh, what a love of a bonnet!"

"Yes, I know. Thank you; everybody has been wishing it to me. But where's Willy?"

"Willy's in bed," cried the woman, coming forward, and speaking

in a whisper. "I don't know what's the matter with him, whether it is a bad cold, or his tooth, or what; but he is in bed, and very ill."

Quick as thought Miss Vereker had stepped over the upright board at the door, placed there to stop the exit, at will, of a younger child than Willy, and had flown into the back room. On one of the beds there—for it contained two—lay the boy, his face almost the colour of scarlet, and his eyes and lips looking hot, swollen and inflamed.

"Dearest little Willy!" she exclaimed, the tears rising to her own eyes, "what is it has made you ill? You will not be able to come up at dusk and see the fireworks."

Dearest *little* Willy! It was her frequent salutation to him, though the boy was nearly as old as she in years; but in deep thought and intellect she was as one twice his age.

Willy did not speak, did not even put out his hand, but lay there looking as ill and feverish as he could well look. And when Miss Harding and the mother entered the room, whither they had followed somewhat slowly, they found Georgina, her white birthday bonnet thrown to the back of her head, and her face close to Willy's, kissing his hot lips, and of course inhaling his breath.

The governess clasped the little girl's waist, and removed her from the bed. "Do you know that you should never go so close to one who is ill, until you know what their disorder may be," she said. "And were it not that you have had measles, you had probably done a dangerous thing now; for I do think the child has them."

"Oh, no, ma'am," interrupted the mother, "Willy has had the measles once. He has been crying all night with the toothache, and I think his face looks inflamed from that. Those decayed back teeth, even in children, often make the face hot and swollen. I don't think it is anything else, though he seems to have got a bad cold with it. He will be better to-morrow, I dare say."

Miss Harding thought the woman was most likely right. She had had little or no experience in the maladies of children. "I would keep him in bed all day," she observed; "he looks extremely feverish."

"And he is very thirsty," returned the mother. "I was making him some toast-and-water when little miss came in. Should he seem no better to-night, I shall ask Mr. Rice to step up and see him."

"I'll bring you a great piece of birthday cake to-morrow," whispered Georgina, leaning on the bed, her face close to the boy's. "And I will tell them to send down some lemons when I go home now; for lemonade is much nicer to drink than toast-and-water. Shall I Willy?"

He panted out a feeble "Yes," and once more kissing his feverish lips, little Miss Vereker followed her governess from the room.

II.

It was a brilliant affair, that birthday night. Old and young were mixed together, for the parents of many a child had come, and were now looking on with eager delight. It may be that each mother thought her own offspring the loveliest and brightest—we all remember the old saying about the crow. But had an unprejudiced observer been present, he would unhesitatingly have pointed out Georgina Vereker as the scene's chief ornament; the one rose amidst a heap of dandelions. Her fairy figure was floating everywhere; her shining curls might be caught a glimpse of, it seemed, in twenty places at once; her elegant gossamer robes were brushing past everyone. Some of the mothers talked askance about vanity and extravagance, and said she was over dressed. Perhaps she was; for the sleeves of her white lace robe were looped up with pearls, a valuable pearl necklace was round her neck, and its bracelets were on her arms. Oh, she was a lovely child! with her exquisite features, their strangely deep expression, and, this night, her brilliant colour. And many of the lads present seemed to know it; for boys, and girls too, have a notion of flirtation at a wonderfully early age.

"What is the matter, my boy?" cried Mrs. Chenevix, to her son, a heavy young gentleman of some ten or eleven years; "why do you look so out of humour?"

"Georgina's gone and danced with Charley Wilde," pouted the boy; "and she knows I wanted her."

"*I* was going to ask Miss Vereker," grumbled another juvenile, "only Charley ran up while I was thinking what to say."

"And that great big Lady Lorton's boy has told her he shall have her next," retorted Master Chenevix; "*he* always has his own way, wherever he goes. It's too bad of Georgina."

Poor Lady Lorton sat close by; a little mite of a shrivelled-up woman; and Master Chenevix had put the "great big" in the wrong place, for he had meant to apply it to her son and heir.

"Georgina," said Mrs. Chenevix, as the child came near her in the dance, "here's Arthur so anxious to be your partner: will you not dance with him?"

"I will dance with him directly that they will let me," returned the fairy; "but they keep asking me so, I have no time. Indeed I will, Arthur," she said earnestly, placing her little hand in his—"I want to dance with you: I hope I shall have time to dance with everybody."

"But you have danced with that big Lorton once, and you are going to dance with him again," retorted Master Chenevix, becoming green with jealousy—"and only look how his hair's curled!"

"Why won't yours curl?" exclaimed Georgina.

"I should like to see them putting mine to curl," returned the

young gentleman, with as much contempt as he could throw into his tone. "They had better try it!"

Had Georgina been a little older, she might have thought of the fox and the grapes; but she only spoke, brimful of sympathy.

"I don't think it would curl," she said innocently, looking at the straight black tails that were brushed so smooth and sleek upon his head.

"But if his hair does curl," answered the desperate boy, whose exasperation had been sevenfold augmented by Georgina's last speech, "that's no reason why you should go and dance with him twice."

"How can I help it if he asks me," replied the little girl. "I don't dance with him because his hair's curled—what has that to do with dancing?"

"Well, I shall vote that we change to blind-man's-buff, or something of that sort, if this is to continue," said Master Chenevix: and he turned away all spleen and spite, while Georgina ran back again to finish the dance she had quitted.

But if other eyes and hearts testified their admiration of Georgina, what can be said of the feelings of Mrs. Vereker? No words could express them. Times upon times that night were the tears in her eyes; times upon times did her bosom heave and swell with its intensity of emotion; for the evident and expressed admiration evinced by others for her darling child wrought her own love and adoration of her to an excess of passion extremely difficult to keep under the bounds of control and concealment. In that child was concentred *all:* her hopes, her happiness, almost her dreams of a hereafter. She performed the duties of hospitality mechanically, her thoughts never wandering from Georgina; she professed interest, according to the dictates of politeness, in her guests' affairs, in her guests' children; but they were in reality uncared for as is the sand by the sea-shore. Georgina, her darling child! Georgina, her only stay on earth! What wonder that others' hopes and sorrows, the cares and the joys that overwhelmed the rest of God's creatures, were lost in the waves of this wild idolatry?

But a few evenings after this one, so few that the elapsed time might be reckoned by hours, a widely different scene was being enacted at Mrs. Vereker's.

Georgina was ill. On the previous day—they recollected it now—she had seemed more quiet and subdued than usual; on this, she had complained of headache, and now she was stretched upon a sofa, her eyelids heavy, her face flushed, a burning thirst upon her, and turning with absolute loathing from the thin slice of toast they were handing her with her tea. Mrs. Vereker had gone to the county town early in the morning; she had business at her solicitor's, and now, in the twilight of that evening, she had re-entered her home, and was leaning over the sofa.

"My dearest! my dearest! what is it? Miss Harding, you have suffered her to play too boisterously, and she has fatigued herself. Look at her flushed face and swollen eyes."

Mrs. Vereker, as she spoke, turned to the governess, a frown upon her brow; but the latter answered quietly:

"She has not played at all! she appeared too languid this morning even to learn her lessons, and I excused them. But within the last hour she has seemed much worse, and has looked as you see her now."

"Mamma," said the little girl, "I think I am going to be ill with the same illness that Willy has. When I saw myself in the glass just before I lay down here, my face looked red and hot like his did on the morning of my birthday. And my throat is so sore."

The very lips of Mrs. Vereker turned livid. *Scarlet fever!*—for that had proved to be the complaint of the gardener's boy. Scarlet fever for *her* child—her inestimable treasure—the only living object she possessed or cared for on earth! Scarlet fever! Ah, Mrs. Vereker, mortals as passionately idolised as is that child of yours, have been removed from amongst us, in spite of our prayers and tears, by that dangerous malady.

Mrs. Vereker's hand shook as she rang the bell, and she spoke in a hurried, nervous manner to the servant who answered it.

"Go to Mr. Rice's instantly—lose not a moment—and bring him up—bring him up with you, do you hear? Miss Vereker is ill."

Another servant, soon afterwards, entered with candles, but she motioned him away with his lights. What! have the windows shut up, and the curtains drawn, when she was watching in that restless state of excitement for the surgeon! He might close the windows of the rest of the house, but not these.

The messenger made good speed, and the surgeon returned with him; nevertheless, to Mrs. Vereker, the time seemed an age: as it does to all who are in a state of painful suspense. Lights were called for now. The doctor was a short, thin man, plain in features, his eyes dark and keen. He was somewhat abrupt in manner, and plain-spoken, but with a kind, sincere heart. He took one of the wax-lights in his hand, and held it so that he might see the face of Georgina. She immediately shaded her eyes with her hand, and turned her face from the light.

"A moment, my dear," said the surgeon; "the light is painful to you possibly, but I will remove it when I have looked at your face. How can I tell what is the matter with you, unless I see your face—eh, Miss Georgy?"

"My head aches so, and my eyes," said the child; but, in all obedience, she turned her face towards Mr. Rice. He looked at her in silence for a few minutes, passed his hand across her brow, set the candle upon the table, and sat down.

"Is it—is it SCARLET FEVER?" inquired Mrs. Vereker, her emotion causing her literally to scream out the words.

"It is scarlet fever," replied the surgeon, quietly—*he* was cautious to betray no emotion. "And, madam, it will be a good thing over. Most people have it once in their lives. Better have it at the age of this child than at yours or mine."

Mrs. Vereker tried to speak; she tried to keep down the terrible emotion that was oppressing her; she tried to suppress all visible tokens of the shock the surgeon's confirmation of her fears had brought; and she could not.

Mr. Rice looked round the room. On a side-table stood a crystal jug filled with water, and a tumbler. He rose, poured some out, and handed it to Mrs. Vereker.

"Oh, doctor!" she whispered, "will she recover? Is there danger?"

"I have had at least twenty cases of scarlet fever this spring," observed the doctor, sitting down and speaking aloud with the calmest, most unconcerned air in the world. "It has been very prevalent, as you know."

"And how many have ——" died, Mrs. Vereker was going to say, but glanced at the child, and changed the question—"how many have recovered?"

"Every one, ma'am: they are all alive and hearty now. And if God helps us, we will bring Miss Georgy through it too. By this day fortnight we shall have her as sprightly as she was on her birthday night."

"How is Willy?" inquired the little girl, forgetting for the moment her own sufferings as she thought of her old playfellow.

"Oh, Willy's well again," replied the surgeon. "He had it very lightly, and his mother is an excellent nurse. But this little patient here had better be got to bed, Miss Harding."

"I will have a large fire made in her room, and the bed warmed," ejaculated Mrs. Vereker. "Miss Harding, will you be kind enough to give the orders, and hurry ——"

"You will have no fire in her room," interrupted the doctor, "and there is no necessity for warming the bed. The room must be kept cool, and well ventilated. If the chimney should be stuffed up, madam—that most pernicious custom, which some people are so fond of—order the stuffing down, and don't ever put it up again: and keep the door open."

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Vereker, not really knowing what she was saying.

"She had better go to bed at once," resumed Mr. Rice; "give her plenty of cooling drink, and I will send up some medicine as soon as I return."

"But she wants to drink every five minutes," interposed Miss Harding.

"And let her," added the surgeon.

"Doctor," cried Mrs. Vereker, following him into the hall, "I shall send an express to W—— to-night for one of the physicians: whom would you recommend?"

"None of them," answered the surgeon. "As far as I am concerned, I would prefer to act alone."

"But if there should be danger," urged Mrs. Vereker.

"There is no danger yet," he replied, "and I trust there will be none. But I can assure you, Mrs. Vereker, were I to see the slightest indication of it, I should be the first to call in additional advice. Were your child in danger, I should shrink from the responsibility of acting alone."

"You are sure you understand the case?" resumed Mrs. Vereker, anxiously.

The doctor laughed cheerily. "I am hard upon sixty years old, madam," he said, "and have had some hundreds of these cases in my long practice."

"But you have lost *some?*"

"What medical practitioner can say he has not?" returned Mr. Rice. "Look at Lady Lorton's child two years ago. They *would not* follow my directions. The lad was cased in flannel, and kept in a room with little or no ventilation, close as an oven, and with a fire large enough to roast an ox, in spite of all I could say or do. Neither did they give him his medicine. When I remonstrated, Lady Lorton's answer was that it was winter, everyone was shivering with cold, so he ought to be kept warm; and that he 'wouldn't' take his physic. The boy died, and where was the wonder?"

"But there are surely cases where the fever takes so desperate a hold, that no treatment, however judicious, can arrest a fatal termination?" persisted Mrs. Vereker, shivering as she listened for the answer.

"Madam, there are such cases," replied the surgeon; "cases in which all the faculty combined could avail nothing. Comparatively speaking, however, they are rare. And pray do not indulge in evil forebodings," he continued, taking her hand kindly; "I know you are more painfully anxious than even most mothers, but there are no fears, so far as can be seen at present, that your daughter will not do well. Above all, appear easy and calm when with her: she is a most sensitive child, and her mind must be kept quiet."

Mrs. Vereker watched the surgeon's exit from the hall door, and then she turned into a little apartment close at hand; the study they called it, for it was where Georgina did her lessons with her governess. There was no sofa in it, but Mrs. Vereker knelt down before a chair —as one might do in intense agony. She pressed her forehead against its bars; she pressed her trembling hands upon her temples: she could have willingly prostrated herself upon the floor in her excess of anguish. One short, impassioned, earnest prayer rose from

her lips to the Throne of Heaven, and as she left the room again her steps staggered as one in weakness. She remembered, however, the surgeon's caution, and she smoothed with her hands the quiet bands of her grey hair, and composed her features to calmness, ere she ventured into the presence of her sick and sensitive child.

## III.

It is the dawn of day. And since the evening last spoken of, so full of painful event to the inmates of one home, that dawn has, some five or six times, risen upon the world.

A large, cheerful chamber. Everything about it rendering it fitted to be the abode of illness; plenty of air, but capable of being warmed, and kept warm, if necessary. The curtains are thrown away from the bed, save on the side where the light is dawning, and the lamp with its shade is placed far away, so that its rays shall not affect the patient. An attendant sits near to that lamp, her head leaning on the high back of the chair, as if from fatigue, and a shawl is drawn closely round her; she evidently feels the chill of that early morning: it is the nurse who has attended the child from her infancy. Seated nearer the bed, with her eyes fixed on the face of her who lies there, is the governess, Miss Harding; her features looking contracted with anxiety, and her pale lips slightly parted. She is watching anxiously; watching she knows not for what; for but little more change can be expected to appear in that cherished patient, and the one great change they scarcely look for yet.

Lying across a corner of the bed's foot, lying prostrate, her head buried in the counterpane, is a grey-haired woman, the very impersonation of keen, hopeless misery. If she could but shed tears it would be better for her, but her anguish is too intense for any such relief. She has shed them abundantly within the last few days, but now it seems as if they were dried up for ever. Oh pity, pity her, for her only child is dying.

How many children in that very village had got safely over this same scarlet fever—brought through its dangers by good Mr. Rice! And yet she, the one it would almost seem marked out by God to be loved here, gifted with an angel's beauty, endowed with pre-eminent intellect, possessing a disposition the noblest and sweetest, she, Georgina Vereker, the very life of her mother's life, was doomed to sink under its malignant toils and die!

The day after it was ascertained what her illness was, the physician from the county town, desired by Mrs. Vereker, was sent for. Not that Mr. Rice saw any necessity for it, but Mrs. Vereker was so painfully anxious, and perhaps the symptoms were not quite so light and favourable as they sometimes are. So the physician came; one well-known by name all over the county, and in adjoining counties also; for Mrs. Vereker would not have chosen him had he been second

in fame to any. We, not to be personal, will call him Dr. Winham. He came. He could do no more than Mr. Rice had already done; but at his second visit he saw cause for apprehension: and, indeed, Mr. Rice began to see it then. And this same cause for apprehension—the symptoms, rather—had gone on from doubtful to serious, from serious to bad, from bad to worse; and there lay Mrs. Vereker in what may be looked upon as the very extremity of earthly misery, baffling in her breast the dreadful question, "Would this be her child's last day of life?"

"The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." Other children—at least many of them—were not prayed for, were not tended, were not watched as this one was. Every care was lavished upon Georgina Vereker; every art that the most subtle physician (and two had been called in now) could invent, was skilfully tried; every moment of her precious life was weighed and tended. *They*, those others, less favoured though they were in attendant circumstances, had struggled through it; some with the aid of a simple practitioner, such as Mr. Rice, some without medical aid at all; some well tended, many badly; they had lived through all, and recovered, and were strong again, whilst *her* life was hanging like a hair in the balance. It is unnecessary to describe the appearances and changes of the disease; the reading of them would but be painful to many: for towards the end, as was the case here, they sometimes grow peculiarly distressing.

Before the beams of the sun had well risen on the earth, Mr. Rice entered the house. He had not left it until long after midnight; but, indeed, for the last few days he had almost lived there. He saw no change for the better, he observed to Mrs. Vereker—he *did* see a change for the worse, but he did not tell her that.

Soon after ten the physicians arrived. What could they say? what do? They saw that the little girl's sands of life had nearly run out: but it would have been cruelty, so they agreed in their physicianly ideas, to intimate as much to Mrs. Vereker.

Who shall describe the awful suspense of that day, the excitement out of doors—for the whole neighbourhood was astir, everyone loving Georgina Vereker—the terrible excitement in? The little child herself was not conscious: she had been at times on the previous day, but that had passed.

"Am I going to die, mamma?" she had feebly asked, during one of these lucid intervals, raising her poor heavy eyes towards her mother, and laying within hers her little feeble hand.

Mrs. Vereker sought to answer cheerfully; she would have given half she was worth to be enabled to do so; but it required an effort and a control far beyond any she had it in her power to call forth. A torrent of sobs, in spite of her struggles, overwhelmed her; and she laid her face upon the suffering child's, and passionately whispered her hopes that she might die with her.

Evening came, and with it again came the two physicians, the journey from the city by rail occupying a very inconsiderable portion of time. The child seemed better than she was in the morning, more quiet, and in less pain: *seemed* better; but *they* were not deceived.

"Gentlemen," exclaimed Mrs. Vereker, following them from the sick-room—following them with her shaking frame and tottering steps, "have you no hope to give me?"

One of the physicians, he bore a title, was a man of few words, and of a nervous manner; he seldom spoke without hesitation, almost a stammer, and he seemed to hesitate now; but Dr. Winham hastened to address the lady.

"We see little difference, madam, little difference in the symptoms, if any. There may be a change by to-morrow."

"She is surely better," cried Mrs. Vereker; "she seems out of pain. Think how restless she was in the morning."

"Madam, we would be willing to give you every consolation in our power," returned Dr. Winham, studying to frame his speech that it should convey as little meaning as possible to an unmedical ear. "These quiet interludes are not *always* a favourable phase of the malady—they may be for good, or they may not."

"Gentlemen," cried the unhappy lady, caring little what she said or did in her painfully wild excitement, and, laying her fevered hands upon those of Dr. Winham, "save my child. If there be any human means, if there be any earthly aid still untried, oh, hasten to employ it. I will reward you both as never medical man has been rewarded hitherto, if you will but save my child."

"Dear madam," replied Dr. Winham, speaking soothingly and feelingly, "we are already doing all in our power, and were there any other known remedies, we should not require the offer of a reward ere we hastened to test them."

"Will you have further help?" she reiterated. "Another of your brother physicians—two of them—as many as you will. Do not cast a thought to expense. Oh, save my child! I look to you, under God, to save my child."

What could they answer? Only reiterate hopes and consoling words, vague as they were vain. And the knight observed that if she had all the medical men of W—— around the bed, they could not do more than was being done.

"You will not go?" she exclaimed. "At least, you will remain the night?"

"Madam," said Dr. Winham, "it is out of our power: we have both of us a consultation to attend in W——: and," he added looking at his watch, "we must hasten thither to be in time. Yet, be assured, if there were the slightest possible benefit that could accrue to the child by our remaining, one at least would have made arrangements to do so. There is no earthly thing that can be tried more than is being already tried, and Mr. Rice will remain with her."

The physicians hastened their departure. "How long do you give her?" inquired one of the other, as they walked towards the railway station.

"Go off in the night, I fancy," was the answer. "It will be a shocking blow to the mother."

"Ah, poor thing! she is to be pitied. I wonder whether the discussion of this new measure will come on to-night in the Lords."

From death to worldly affairs: so it ever will be. And these physicians were no more callous than their brethren *not* of the profession.

The sun had set. The grey twilight was falling upon the sick room, throwing the bed into its shade—a darker shadow scarcely needed to be cast upon the little face that lay there dying. An angel's face, they had called it on earth: soon now to be changed into that of a pure angel in heaven.

The deepest silence reigned in the room. Mr. Rice sat by the bed; the governess stood away, her forehead pressed against one of the cold window-panes; and the fond, faithful nurse was indulging in silent tears.

But Mrs. Vereker! She knelt there at the head of the bed, her face resting on the pillow, and her warm cheek almost placed in contact with Georgina's. Mr. Rice had tried in vain to arouse her: words and silence seemed alike useless.

For the twentieth time the surgeon stooped over the little, passive face, straining his eyes to look at it by what light remained, and listening to the painful breathing. And this time, with a somewhat hasty movement, he passed his hand across her brow, and, from that, laid it, still hurriedly, upon her little hand, and then called in an under-tone to the nurse, who came forward with silent footsteps.

"A light, instantly," he whispered.

Oh, the change that had passed over that unconscious face! Surely, surely, it was that of death! No, not yet, not quite that of death, but one of the changes which are apt immediately to precede it.

What frightful emotion was it that was attacking Mrs. Vereker? for she had looked with the rest. It was not hysterics; it was not convulsions; it was not insanity: something, perhaps, of all three. The heavy eyelids in that changing face partly unclosed themselves at the wild sounds. Mr. Rice acted with promptness: he made a sign to the nurse, called to another servant, and, together, the three bore Mrs. Vereker by force to her chamber, and laid her on her bed.

When the violence of her emotion had somewhat spent itself and she looked up, Mr. Rice had retired, but another gentleman was standing there in his place. It was the Reverend Mr. Chenevix, the hard-working, indefatigable rector of the parish: the first to adminster consolation to a bed of sorrow, the last to leave it. He had come up in the twilight hour, thinking some in that house might need those

whispered words, which none, save a minister of God, can so effectively utter.

"Let me go to her," burst forth Mrs. Vereker, passionately. "If I am not to die with her, as I have prayed, let me at least see the last of her."

Mr. Chenevix gently restrained her.

"There is little more to see," he answered. The last is all but over, and, indeed, it is not fitting that you should be there. But, oh, Mrs. Vereker! recollect that she is being removed from a world of sin and sorrow to a place where sin and sorrow cannot enter."

Mr. Chenevix could not continue, for a torrent of words, of passion, of unrestrained grief, in its wildest indulgence, broke from the lips of the unhappy lady, and overwhelmed his voice.

"Sin and sorrow for *her!*" were some of the intelligible words he caught—"who shall dare to say it? Who was guarded from it as she was?—whose fate in life was so bright as hers?—who would watch over another as I would have watched over her, and sheltered her from all harm? Give such consolation to those whom it may fit—it cannot apply to me! Oh, Georgina! Georgina! why did God give her to me to remove her again—why let me taste the bliss of heaven upon earth to snatch it away? Why should *I* be singled out for misery?—other mothers can keep their children; others, whose love and care are not a tithe of mine!—what have I done that this heavy blow should be visited upon me?"

"The ways of God are past finding out," broke in the quiet voice of the minister. "When these afflictions are sent to us, we are apt to look upon them but *as* afflictions, not seeing the mine of love and mercy that is hidden in their working."

"Who was so beautiful as Georgina?" wailed the prostrated woman; "who so loving and beloved? Who was so bright an ornament here? who so fitting for earth?"

"Say, rather, who was so fitting for heaven," interrupted the clergyman, meekly. "That is a brighter land than this, Mrs. Vereker: and God himself is there waiting to wipe away the tears from all eyes. Be assured that he has been compassionate to you in His wisdom, though you may see it not."

"I cannot live without her—I cannot LIVE! Is there NO hope? Oh, if God would spare her life and take mine!"

"God's judgment is not as ours," remonstrated the clergyman. "He may be snatching your child from the evil to come. The paths of the least afflicted here are but as paths of thorns; some of them more thorny than we can well bear."

With a sudden spring Mrs. Vereker left the side of the bed, where she had been reclining, and knelt down before it, a reckless prayer pouring from her lips.

"Almighty God, Thou who art sending this affliction upon me, oh in Thy great love and mercy avert it. Spare my child to me! Let

her path here be as the paths of others if Thou wilt, thorny, sorrowful, but, oh, spare her life: leave me not here alone to support this dire anguish."

Mr. Chenevix would have raised her, speaking remonstrating but soothing words: he saw how useless it was to say much then.

"As one of God's creatures, as one who hopes some time to be taken to that home of bliss whither your daughter is hastening, I entreat you, Mrs. Vereker, let your supplications to the Most High be of a different nature, couched in different words. He knows what is best for you; pray only that His will may be done—may He give you grace to implore it with your whole heart."

But she cared not, heard him not; and pushing him from her with reckless impetuosity, the same wild, startling cry was carried up to heaven imploringly:

"Not Thy will, Lord, but MINE be done!"

## IV.

"NOT Thy will, Lord, but mine be done!" Such was the substance of the prayer poured forth by Mrs. Vereker.

But a very short period had elapsed, and Mr. Chenevix was still venturing to speak what he could of consolation, when Mrs. Vereker, looking up from the bed where she was again reclining, saw Mr. Rice enter the room. He came up, and stood by the minister. His face wore a strange expression of hope and joy, causing the life-blood to beat in her heart as it had not yet beaten since the first hours of Georgina's illness.

"Can you bear hope," he said, "better than you have borne despair?"

She did not answer. She looked at him with her fearfully eager eyes; their expression too plainly asking him what she could not.

"The alarming change that took place in the child's countenance, when you were hurried from the room—I do not know that it was for death."

"The best and the worst," she murmured; "let me know it."

"Then I think it was the crisis of the disorder, and that the child is better," the surgeon answered. "She is sleeping sweetly now."

With a sharp cry, partly of joy, partly of pain, Mrs. Vereker essayed to rise from the bed, but the doctor laid his arm across her.

"Not for the world," he uttered. "I know what you would do: you would hasten to the bedside of your daughter, and your presence there might undo all the good that is being done. I do not say she will recover, but I do say there is now a chance of it: and to give that chance a fair trial, she must be kept perfectly still, and free from excitement."

Mrs. Vereker clasped Mr. Rice's hands, and burst into a flood of more refreshing tears than any she had in her whole life shed. "I

will do all you wish," she uttered: "only come to me from time to time, and tell me that my child's life is being spared."

"I will come to you with news of the slightest change that shall take place in her," answered the surgeon; and as he left the room on his return to Georgina's chamber, Mrs. Vereker turned her face to Mr. Chenevix, and, sobbing upon his arm, declared that Heaven had answered her prayer.

It seemed that the child's life was to be spared; for as hour succeeded hour, day, day, and week, week, she appeared to grow gradually but surely on to convalescence; and ere the summer well came, she was sporting about, gay as ever. To describe the ecstatic joy of her mother would be impossible; no words could do justice to it; no imagination, however vivid, could adequately portray it: the word "idolatry" would be weak as applied to the feeling cherished by Mrs. Vereker for her child. Be assured that Heaven never meant an all-absorbing passion, such as this, to be indulged in on earth.

But it is not of the *childhood* of Georgina Vereker that we need make further record. Let us hasten on.

## V.

YEARS, years had gone by, almost as a dream in their swift flitting, and that one dangerous phase in Georgina's life—that period which had seemed to Mrs. Vereker as the concentration of all earthly agony—was become but as a remote link in life's remembrance. A more truly dangerous phase, though the mother saw it not, was advancing now.

Sweetly simple in appearance, yet queen-like; of manners gentle and winning, yet perfectly self-possessed; her beauty of the rarest character, yet betraying no vanity or consciousness of its own charm—such was Miss Vereker as she grew towards womanhood. She was in her eighteenth year now, looking older, and her mother was painfully awake to the hints, dropped sometimes by friends, that one so attractive as Georgina would not be long suffered to remain an inmate of her maiden home. Mrs. Vereker would willingly have kept her in it for ever; and few were so carefully guarded from all advances of the other sex as was Georgina Vereker.

It was a lovely, lovely afternoon in May, and Georgina sat drawing by the side of her mother. The windows were open to the ground, and Mrs. Vereker reclined in her easy-chair, now enjoying the scent wafted in from the garden flowers, now looking at the group of flowers Georgina was painting. There were few worldly accomplishments in which Georgina did not excel; talents, rarely combined in one person, were united in her. She was a sweet singer, a brilliant player; in short, gifted as she was in person, so was she in talent and intellect.

"Here comes Ruth!" exclaimed Georgina, as a neat-looking young

woman was seen approaching the house. She was the housemaid of Mrs. Chenevix.

"What is it, Ruth?" called out Mrs. Vereker, making a sign to the girl to approach the window.

"Miss Elizabeth has sent me up with this note, ma'am," was the servant's reply, handing the note she spoke of to Georgina.

"Ruth, I will go back with you," cried Georgina, as she read its contents. "Elizabeth wants me to spend the evening there, mamma."

It may be observed, that Georgina did not say "May I go?" as most young ladies think it necessary to do when addressing a parent; she decided instantly for herself. But the extreme system of indulgence carried on by Mrs. Vereker had long caused Georgina's will to be law in all things: *she* governed; Mrs. Vereker obeyed. Not that in this instance there could be any grounds for objecting to her wish. Elizabeth and Charlotte Chenevix were her intimate friends; they were good girls, desirable companions, and Georgina was often at the rectory.

"I'll go with Ruth now, mamma," she repeated, as she put aside her painting-box, "and you can send for me in the evening."

The large family of Mr. and Mrs. Chenevix were almost reared. The youngest boy was at college, and of the elder sons, one was just appointed to a country curacy, the rest were in various mercantile situations in London, hoping some time to make their way in the world. The income of Mr. Chenevix, stretch it out as he would, was barely two hundred a year: a rich rectory, belonging to a small parish close by, was of the value of two thousand! When will these disparities in a Christian Church be done away? So the Reverend Mr. Chenevix, like many another badly-paid reverend divine, was compelled to do something to increase his income, and he took pupils. Half-a-dozen little boys, not more, who for the consideration of fifty pounds a year each, were boarded, lodged and instructed in the Rectory. He would willingly have given all his time to his clerical duties: to the poor, to the sick, to all the rest of the needs of a large parish; but neither he nor any other clergyman can bring up a large family, in the respectability suitable to their station, upon two hundred a year. The question may have arisen in the mind of a looker-on, acquainted with the intimacy between the families, "Does Mr. Chenevix ever cast a thought towards Miss Vereker as a possible wife some day for one of his sons?" No; Mr. Chenevix was not ambitious, and he never cast a thought towards anything so improbable, for he knew he might just as well have cast a thought towards one of the stars.

Georgina and the servant walked to the Rectory, taking the rural way through the fields in preference to that of the dusty road. As they came in view of the house, they observed a strange gentleman, young and handsome, as he looked from the distance, pacing to and

fro the broad gravel walk in front of the Rectory windows, and talking to Mrs. Chenevix.

It proved to be Master Harry Lindon's guardian—Master Harry being one of the little pupils. A tall, fine, aristocratic-looking man, with a great deal of what the world might call beauty in his countenance, but mixed with a singularly disagreeable expression—half sinister, half sneer. It was only to be observed, however, when he was off his guard, or when his features were in repose. He looked about eight-and-twenty, but he may have been older.

He was invited to spend the evening with Mr. and Mrs. Chenevix, as a matter of course. His handsome eyes would wander, perhaps in spite of his will, towards Miss Vereker, with a glance of earnest admiration; and she, as she once or twice caught that glance, blushed with a deep blush: secluded as she had been, admiration from one of the other sex was so new.

"Who is Mr. Lindon?" she inquired of Elizabeth Chenevix, in the course of the evening.

"We only know him as Harry Lindon's guardian," returned Miss Chenevix; "the cousin of his late father, I think Harry said one day. It is he who pays Harry's bills; but this is the first time he has come to see him."

Did a shadow of the future fall upon the heart of Mrs. Vereker that night? Not it; for how was it likely that the passing remark made by her daughter on her return, that Harry Lindon's guardian had arrived from London to see him, and had taken tea at the Rectory, should induce it? A guardian! Mrs. Vereker associated the name with a staid, sober man, advanced in years, one with white hair, probably, like herself. It never occurred to her to suppose that this Mr. Lindon was young and handsome, and Georgina did not mention that he was so.

They had probably imagined that Mr. Lindon would have returned to town immediately; but he remained in the village to "have some fishing," he said. He took up his quarters at the village inn, the Cross Keys: the place contained two, but the Lion had but sorry accommodation for fastidious travellers. It may be that Mr. Lindon found the Cross Keys a desirable residence, for he stayed on, and seemed to give no intimation of departing. He was soon "up to the local politics," to quote his own phrase when speaking of the passing information he had acquired. He was an agreeable, talkative man when he pleased—and that was when he had an end to serve; and he entered freely into conversation with his host and hostess, who were pleased to be communicative in return; so that soon there was not a fact, not a surmise, not an old wife's tale, relative to the village and its inmates, that he was unacquainted with.

One day, about a month after his arrival, he was leaning against the door of the hostess's back parlour, half in the garden, half

in the room, lounging idly and smoking his meerschaum, when the conversation turned upon Miss Vereker.

"A dev'lish handsome girl," was Mr. Lindon's careless remark.

"The old lady knows it, too," returned his hostess, who was busy shelling peas; "and keeps her tightly as she would the very apple of her eye. You must understand, sir, the way in which the property is left naturally causes her to be cautious."

"How's that left?" inquired the gentleman.

"Half Mrs. Vereker's fortune goes to Miss Georgina unconditionally, when she shall be twenty-one; or on her wedding-day, should she marry previous to that. The rest will be hers at her mother's death."

"Marry with the mother's consent, I presume?"

"No, sir; the mother need not give her consent any more than you or I. Miss Georgina is left unfettered. Many persons censure Mr. Vereker for having made such a will: it may possibly place her in the power of some scamp, or fortune-hunter, who would marry her to get possession of her money."

Mr. Lindon retained his position against the door-post, and smoked slowly on till his pipe was exhausted. He then gave himself a hearty stretch or two, and sauntered upstairs to his bedroom.

A little alteration in his dress, a few touches to his hair and his shining whiskers, a removal of all odour left by his late indulgence, and he took his way to the field path leading from Mrs. Vereker's house to the Rectory, and there met Georgina.

Not for the first time had he now met her there. And, oh! what had that dangerous man been saying, what done, that that crimson blush, half timidity, half love, should rise to the young girl's face? Alas! alas! even from the very date of his arrival, he had been working to lay his coils round her maiden heart.

Working in secret, not openly: never man knew better than he how to go about his work. Why, in the Rector's family it was thought that he admired Charlotte Chenevix; and the village, who, as usual, must interfere with everyone's affairs but its own, set down his lengthy stay to Charlotte's account. He had spoken of Charlotte's perfections to Mrs. Vereker: he had hinted to her that a clergyman's daughter, domestically brought up, would be the very match that a man of moderate fortune, like himself, ought to make. But what cared he for Charlotte Chenevix?—what would he have cared had he gained her love and broken her heart?—all his aim was to throw Mrs. Vereker off her guard, to blind her to his admiration for Georgina.

The two young ladies themselves were not deceived. *Alone* with Charlotte Chenevix, and he never addressed to her a gallant word, or gave her an admiring look; it was only in the presence of others that his paraded attentions were bestowed on her. And in these atten-

tions, when they came to be analysed, there was nothing tangible—nothing that a bystander could construe into a proof of love. Now mark the difference. When he and Miss Vereker were in the company of others, he never distinguished her by a word or by the most remote attention; but in those stolen interviews, which had been accidental and not sought on *Georgina's* part, every tone, every glance was calculated to betray that he was seeking her heart and to plant in it a love for him. But he had not told her so in words: Georgina was honest and open as the day, and he knew that to speak yet, to speak before *his* time came, before she was wholly his in mind and heart, would have been to frustrate all his plans. Mine hostess of the Cross Keys deemed she was imparting an agreeable bit of gossip when she spoke of Miss Vereker's fortune and how it was left: she little thought that she was telling him what he already knew, and had known since the second or third day of his arrival. No, no, he was too wily to risk the loss of Georgina and her fortune by prematurely asking her to marry him, or telling her he loved: that must come when he had made his way sure, and held her future in his own hands. And there he was now, essaying to wind himself and his coils more deeply in her heart, retaining in his that slender hand which had been timidly proffered to him in greeting, leaning down until his honeyed tones, intangible though their words might be, almost seemed to come in contact with her blushing cheek, as he turned to walk side by side with her on that sunny June day. On one side of their path lay the hedge, with its sweet wild roses wafting around their perfume; on the other was the field of long mowing grass, soon to come to the scythe; above them were the joyous sun, the blue sky, and the balmy air; and pleasant though these accessories were, it was to ordinary eyes but an ordinary path, yet to Georgina Vereker it seemed as one cast in the garden of Eden. Ask not wherefore, you who have loved, but remember, if the world's cares have not seared that remembrance from you, the days that followed the awaking of the passion in your own bosoms.

"Georgina," observed her mother to her that same evening, "do you think matters will soon be settled between Mr. Lindon and Charlotte Chenevix?"

Georgina turned away, hiding her flushed face from her mother, as she constrained herself to say that she did not think Mr. Lindon loved Charlotte Chenevix.

"Why do you not think so? Upon what grounds?" was the quick rejoinder of Mrs. Vereker.

Georgina could not say: "Because he loves me," for Richard Lindon had not *told* her of his love; and had he done so, she could not have imparted it to any human being, not even to her own mother. *She* tell of that new passion, which was concealed in every crevice of her heart, a passion that was rendering her life a heaven, she with her shrinking sensitiveness!—when do the young ever do so?

"My opinion is, and I speak from his avowed sentiments to me," continued Mrs. Vereker, "that Charlotte Chenevix will be his chosen wife."

Georgina thought her mother was mistaken; nevertheless, a sharp pang shot across her heart at the prophecy, proving how completely it was being enthralled. And Mrs. Vereker, woe for her! was soon to be undeceived.

VI.

THERE were sounds in Mrs. Vereker's house as of weeping and wailing; there was a sharp altercation, never yet heard there; there were prayerful entreaties, ay, and ventured threats on the one side, and there was fixed determination, that would not be overcome, on the other.

On that hot August day—strange that Mrs. Vereker could have been so long blind!—it all came out. Mr. Lindon made his proposals for Georgina in due form, and the shock fell upon the startled mother like a thunderbolt.

She scarcely heard him to an end; she instantly and haughtily rejected him, but he persisted; and as she grew positive, he grew bold; bolder than a suitor for a daughter ought to be.

"It will be useless to deny her to me," he said in his hardiness; "her heart and will are mine. She has made her choice, Mrs. Vereker, and you must sanction it."

"*Must* sanction it!" cried the outraged lady. "Sir! you forget yourself. My daughter never shall be yours."

He had all but retorted that she had no control in the matter, that Miss Vereker was her own mistress, but he closed his lips on the offensive words.

"I will look in again in the evening, madam," he said; "by which time I trust your feeling towards me will be softened. Meanwhile, speak with your daughter: you will, I flatter myself, find that her affections are irrevocably mine; and you surely will not be the one to thrust unhappiness upon her."

Mr. Lindon took his departure, and Georgina Vereker was before her mother. It was as Richard Lindon had asserted: her heart and mind had become wholly his: her hopes were entwined with his hopes, her entire life was wrapped up in his life. He had employed his time and his powers of attraction well. She could see no fault in him; she could not believe that he ever had or ever would have one: to her he seemed perfection, a something between a saint and a high-souled cavalier; and she could imagine no lot so favoured on earth, as that of one who might be permitted to spend it as the companion of him. They do well who represent love as blind.

Oh that miserably mistaken system of over-indulgence!—of never contradicting a child until it becomes your master! Georgina had

never been denied a wish—how could she understand denial now? Sounds of weeping and wailing? Yes, but they came from Mrs. Vereker. Georgina was agitated and pale, but she was firm in her own will.

"Child!" cried Mrs. Vereker, "he can never make you happy. He is a bad man, a wicked man: I see it in every turn of his countenance, and in the glance of his keen eye. To marry this man will be to rush on to your destruction."

"You are prejudiced against him," was the reply of Georgina. "You did not say this when you fancied he was going to marry Charlotte Chenevix."

"That was in the earlier period of our acquaintance, when I had had little time to mark and observe him. I have not thought lately that his attentions were given to Charlotte Chenevix, or I would have imparted to Mr. Chenevix my unaccountable antipathy to him. God forgive me for not discovering that his thoughts were directed to you."

"What can you urge against him?" asked the girl, in a low tone.

"Georgina," replied her mother, "the very fact of his being a stranger to us should ensure your refusal of him. What do we know of this man—of his connections—of his former life?"

But Mrs. Vereker might as well have talked to the winds. Georgina was as firm as she was; and in the evening, when Mr. Lindon was again present, the discussion had not terminated.

"How can you dare," cried Mrs. Vereker, passionately, "to come between this child and her mother? Know you not that she is all I have in the world—that for her sake alone I have cared to live? *You* will never bring her happiness—you are not calculated to do it."

"Of that your daughter is the best judge," replied Mr. Lindon, biting his lips to restrain the passion that was rising.

"I do not believe you truly care for her," retorted Mrs. Vereker. "A fortune such as Georgina's is no slight attraction to the unprincipled."

"Oh mother! mother!" burst from the pale lips of Georgina.

"Child!" cried Mrs. Vereker, giving full vent to her excitement, and passing over towards Mr. Lindon, "here we stand, side by side: the mother who bore you, who tended you, who cherished you; your idolising mother, who has never had a word for you save that of love; your poor mother, whose race in life must soon be over: and he, this acquaintance of a few weeks; this man you would call husband: we stand before you, choose between us."

It was a trying moment. Georgina pushed the curls from her heated forehead; she essayed to utter words, but they would not issue from her trembling lips; she turned from one to the other in her moment of anguish. And then that man, her betrothed, advanced with a sudden impulse, and clasped her to his heart. She looked imploringly at her mother, and burst into an impetuous flood of tears; *but she clung to him.*

VII.

Soon after the marriage, which of course took place, strange rumours stole into the village respecting Mr. Lindon. The first came from a former pupil of Mr. Chenevix, now a lawyer in London, and who came down to pass a day with his old master. Singular things come out sometimes, especially to lawyers, and this gentleman happened to know the history of Richard Lindon. The lad he had placed with Mr. Chenevix, as his ward, Harry Lindon, was his son, and the boy's mother, with her numerous offspring, was not his wife, though she ought to have been. Other facts to his disadvantage he also mentioned.

"*Don't* you think you are mistaken?" uttered the disturbed Rector, as a hundred painful ideas flashed conflictingly upon his mind. "Perhaps there are two Richard Lindons. He married only last autumn, a sweet girl whom you may remember, Miss Vereker."

"May God help her, then!" uttered the guest. "He is one of the greatest villains that ever walked. Ah! it is her money, then, is it, that he has been dipping into so freely lately!"

The Rector kept his own counsel, though he could no longer hope that his informant was mistaken; but rumours to the same effect arose from other sources, and some of them at length reached the ear of Mrs. Vereker. It was whispered, no one could exactly say whence the report arose, that he made Georgina a most wretched husband; that he was dissipating her fortune in the pursuit of every known vice, which, to add to his iniquity, he did not conceal from her. The whole of these tales did not reach Mrs. Vereker, but certain vague hints did, quite sufficient to render her life one of suspense and anxiety. Who can describe that lonely woman's unhappiness from the time of her daughter's wedding-day? Not an evening passed that she did not shed tears of regret after her darling child; not an hour wore on, but she thought of her ingratitude (as she could not help calling it) with a sharp, ever-recurring pang; not a moment, but she was tormented with fears that her child had embraced a lot of misery. She had expected and hoped to be invited to London to see her in her new home; she told Georgina in her letters how she wished for it; but the latter never gave the invitation, nay, rather repressed her idea of coming. But as the months wore on, it seemed to Mrs. Vereker that she could bear the separation and the incertitude no longer; and as the autumn leaves fell from the trees to the ground, like her own old withered hopes, she wrote letter after letter to her daughter, imploring her to come home, if but for ever so short a time, and let her see her once again.

Those leaves were long ago gone, and the naked branches covered with snow, ere Georgina answered her mother's prayer; and perhaps it would not have been answered then, but that illness had seized upon Mrs. Vereker. Caused chiefly by distress of mind, the doctors said

when they wrote to Mrs. Lindon, and it might be, they added, that she was close upon death.

But oh! mistake not Georgina. That one infatuated hasty act of her life, the quitting her mother's home for a stranger of whom she knew nought, save his honied words, had been bitterly atoned for, and no child ever yearned as she did to throw herself into the sheltering arms of a parent. But how could she appear in her early home, and betray what was her unhappy life—she with her broken spirit, her pale, sad face, and her wasted form? She had shrunk from adding certainty to the fears of that ill-requited mother: alas, that it must be done now.

She came home alone. Her husband did not accompany her. Business detained him in London, she said, as she sank, with a paroxysm of sobs that belied her words, upon her mother's bosom. Her old friends and acquaintance looked on her with an aching heart: if ever despair was written legibly on a countenance, it was written on hers. They did not question her; they would not appear to notice her changed looks; they only inquired with frigid politeness after Mr. Lindon, and hoped he was well. Poor Mr. Chenevix, divided between his wish to express a silent sympathy for her, and a fear to discover that he knew more of her domestic sorrows than she would like, nearly betrayed himself; for as he stroked down the shining hair on either side her head, a favourite action of his when she was a young and happy girl, she suddenly looked up at him and saw the tears running down his cheeks. Even her mother forbore to question her. She observed that Georgina strove to appear cheerful before her, as if fearful that otherwise such questioning might take place. So they talked mostly upon indifferent matters.

"Georgina," began Mrs. Vereker to her one day, "have you ever been down to Braesbrook—I think they call the spot, near London—to see Mr. Lindon's relatives there? Harry Lindon's mother, you know."

What could there be in this simple question thus to have excited Georgina? She did not answer, but she raised her hands to her face to shade the most burning colour that had for months appeared there. In vain she struggled with her agitation; in vain she strove to repress the sobs that rose from her very heart: it would not do, and she clung to her mother, and sobbed hysterically.

"My child," gasped forth the unhappy lady, "I have forborne to question you; I have neither blamed nor soothed; but I have not the less seen what is your unhappy lot. Tell me all. You are but a child yet, Georgina, a child of nineteen, and I have well-nigh numbered three-score years and ten. Who so fitting to soothe your cares? Tell me all, Georgina, as you would have done when you were a little child."

"Mother, I shall never tell you," was the answer, and it seemed to be wrung from a breaking heart. "I chose my own lot, chose

it in defiance of you, the truest and dearest friend I possessed on earth, and I must abide by it. Outraged, insulted, thwarted though I may be, what have I to do but bear?"

"We will live together as of old, Georgina," murmured Mrs. Vereker. "My home shall be your home, my affection your abiding-place. You shall never go again to that great city, with its deceit and its wicked ways—you shall never again be subjected to ill-treatment from *him*. It was a sad mistake, my child, but I will endeavour to atone to you for it."

"Mother!" exclaimed Mrs. Lindon, starting up, and throwing her hair wildly back—the same curls that she had once before pushed from her heated brow in avowing, though not by words, her love for that bad man—"mother, do not tempt me with a vision of peace that for me can never be realised. He is my husband, and I must return to him."

## VIII.

THE time dragged itself slowly on, months upon months, and oh! what a home was Georgina's! "Outraged, insulted, thwarted!" she had said to her mother; ay, and she was more than all these. Her fortune was quite dissipated, and her husband in debt, so that he moved her about from one obscure lodging to another, that he might escape the annoyance of duns. It was a common thing for him not to return home at all, night after night, or perhaps he would come when the cold grey of the winter morning was beginning to dawn, and she had to rise from her bed on the third floor, and go downstairs, shivering, to let him in, and to meet his abuse. Intoxicated he would generally be—what else, save his not being in his sober senses, could have induced even a demon tauntingly to relate to an innocent wife the particulars of the scenes in which he had passed the night? *Her* charms had long ceased to attract him, he would insultingly say to her: and she would cross her meek arms upon her bosom, and pray for patience to *bear*.

But even this treatment, bad as it was, grew to worse. For the last twelve months—and they had been married between two and three years now—she had been in the frequent habit, in obedience to his imperious commands, often threats, of writing to Mrs. Vereker for money, and that lady had responded to these demands to an extent which had seriously impoverished herself. She therefore said that she would supply no more, especially as she had reason to believe that the whole of it went to support Mr. Lindon in his shameless habits; but she urgently entreated Georgina to abandon her miserable home, and to return to that of her childhood. This letter was addressed to Mrs. Lindon; it was intended for her eye alone; but Mr. Lindon—as if such a man could possess honour or scruples—took it from the postman, broke the seal, and read it. His conduct to

his wife after this was worse than any she had yet experienced; blows, even, he had more than once the cowardice to resort to. It was about this period, also, that he introduced to her, in spite of her remonstrances, certain companions of his own sex: they overwhelmed her with their attentions; they spoke to her of sympathy for her sufferings; of redress; they breathed in her ear specious counsels. One or two of them were attractive as she had once thought *him;* nevertheless, she shrank from them. She had occasion once to complain to her husband of their conduct, and he answered her with a strange, mocking answer—an answer which brought the life-blood into her cheeks, and she retorted by asking whether he had forgotten that she was his WIFE? Wife, he answered, sneeringly, he believed to his sorrow she was, but he had long thought he should be better without her. Georgina pressed her hands upon her eyes, and stifled the anger that would have arisen to her lips, but her indignant feelings were almost goaded to madness.

## IX.

MRS. VEREKER was in London. For five long weeks had she heard nothing from Georgina, her own letters to her had remained unanswered, and unable to support the nameless fears that oppressed her, she, old and unfitted for the journey as she was, resolved to make it. Upon her arrival in town, she drove at once to the address last given by her daughter. She was almost, not quite, prepared for its mean appearance; but the occupier of the house, a decent-looking woman enough, told her she knew nothing of the movements of Mrs. Lindon.

"Is she not lodging here?" inquired Mrs. Vereker.

"She has left these several weeks past," returned the landlady. "She left her husband one night and never came back. Ah, ma'am, I have my fears—but for whatever may have happened, Mr. Lindon is to blame. I was thankful when I got rid of him, though he did not leave for three weeks afterwards: he is a bad, wicked man."

What did the landlady mean, Mrs. Vereker asked; but the landlady would explain herself no further: she might get into trouble by speaking her thoughts, she observed; and after all she was not sure.

"I will give you this five-pound note," exclaimed Mrs. Vereker, "and thank you gratefully for all you may have done for my child when she was here: only, if you have any clue to her, for the love of heaven give it me."

"You surely cannot be that young lady's mother!" exclaimed the landlady.

"I am her mother," replied Mrs. Vereker. "I see you think me too old, but I did not marry until late in life; and I look older than I really am, for recent cares have helped to age my face. Oh, if you possess it, give me the clue to find my child."

"I have no clue, indeed," returned the landlady, in a com-

passionate voice. "I know that her husband was a perfect brute to her, and if—if she should have gone wrong," she continued, cautiously, "he drove her to it. But I know nothing scarcely, ma'am; and should not have known that till this morning. My son is an upper servant in a gentleman's family, and he called here to-day, and it was he told me."

"Told what?" gasped Mrs. Vereker.

"Well, ma'am, he saw a lady last night at the Opera, all blazing with jewels, and it was Mrs. Lindon. And the gentleman who put her into a carriage, and got in with her, was one of them fashionable rakes that used to come here when her husband was away."

Mrs. Vereker turned from the house, faint and sick at heart.

On the next Opera night, in the midst of all the blaze of light, beauty and diamonds, in a box so placed as to command a good view of the general company, sat, partially hidden by a drawn curtain, a worn, white-haired woman. She was accompanied only by a gentleman, who looked like a solicitor, and those who caught a glimpse of her perhaps wondered what she did there. It was Mrs. Vereker. Never for a moment was her heart still—beating, beating; never were her eyes tired of watching the many lovely countenances, especially those who were but then entering. And now—now, at a distance, almost too far for her dim sight, she saw a form which seemed strangely familiar, adorned with satin and lace and glittering jewels: the face was a very lovely one; its luxuriant hair was wreathed in bands; a damask colour, not too deep, sat on the cheeks, beautiful, most beautiful to look at, but false as she was—and that face was the face of Georgina Vereker.

Of Georgina Lindon, rather. But it wore a look widely different from that her mother had ever seen there. That old, white-haired woman rose silently, and tottered from the box she had occupied, preceded by her solicitor. He took her to another part of the house, lonely and quiet, and bade her wait while he fetched her daughter to her. Once more they stood face to face, the mother and the misguided child.

"Georgina," uttered the former, kneeling in her bitter desperation, "the world would condemn and shun you, but I will only cling the closer. Leave all this wretchedness, and come home with me."

"Mother, mother," she answered, burying her face in her hands, "I was goaded to madness, and I became what you see. You must leave me to my fate: a career such as mine, once entered upon, admits not of retreat. Forget that you ever possessed a child."

"Do you know what that career leads to?" moaned the unhappy mother. "Do you remember that it brings destruction?"

"Ay, both to body and soul. I tell you I was mad when I rushed upon it. But revenge on *him* seemed sweet."

Mrs. Vereker wrung her hands, the scalding tears blinding her sight as she spoke:

"Come to your early home, come back with me, my child; and for the remainder of your days find peace on earth."

"Peace!" uttered Georgina, "say, rather, scorn. Rich and poor, good and bad, would shun me now. Do you think I would willingly encounter that, in the place where they knew me a little child? No, no; retreat for me is impossible. Farewell, mother, mother! Forget me from this hour: or should your thoughts ever turn to me, pray that the fate which must inevitably be mine may fall speedily. I would now that my heart were broken."

Mrs. Vereker stretched out her arms piteously as Georgina retreated, her jewels glittering as she walked. A wild cry escaped her lips, but she was powerless to stop her. At that cry, Georgina turned. Perhaps she would have gone back to her mother, for she seemed to hesitate, when at the same moment, one of those stylish men who had been with her in the box, advanced and drew her with him.

Again she resumed her seat in it, he by her side, and others round her. Her mother watched it all—the dazzling beauty, the free manners, the painted face of her only child: and, as she looked, a sensation of sudden faintness stole over her; a film came across her eyes; and remembrance, as a vision, rose before her, carrying her back to that child's infancy, when she was lying, as they thought, upon her dying bed. And now came the mother's punishment.

What was it she had then prayed for? God had been about to take the child; to remove her from the evil days to come; and she, the mother, in her blind want of faith, had prayed, "Spare the child's life to gladden me. Not Thy will, Lord, but mine be done!"

Oh, surely He was a God of love. He had foreseen a future for the child, that she, poor, weak mortal that she was, could not; and He had been willing, in His great mercy, to take her to Him then in her innocence. And look at that child now, at the thing she has become; living without God; scarcely hoping to come to Him hereafter. Oh, that Mrs. Vereker could exchange this fearful scene before her for that early death-bed! She moaned aloud as she sank upon her knees, and raised her hands to heaven in her bitter repentance, offering upwards words almost as sinful as were those of that early prayer:

"Oh, Father, Father! why didst Thou listen to me—why save my child from that happy death to destroy her now? Punish, punish me if Thou wilt: but, oh! find a means to save the soul of my misguided child!"

No—no: it was not to be. There sat Georgina, in her destructive beauty; and there knelt Mrs. Vereker, in her repentant, hopeless despair. The faintness that had been stealing over her seemed to increase till she lost all consciousness, and——she awoke.

Mrs. Vereker awoke. The clock was on the stroke of midnight, and she found that she must have slept nearly four hours. Exhausted by grief, she had dropped asleep upon her bed, soon after uttering the short-sighted, rebellious prayer which had so pained Mr. Chenevix;

had dreamed that Mr. Rice came into the room saying the child would live, had dreamed all the rest of that long dream. Not so elaborately as it is given here in its details, but all its essential points. Gradually, as her waking recollection grew perfect, she became aware, with an intensity of relief she could never describe, that it was *but* a dream—that the time of that early death-bed was indeed PRESENT, not *past;* that Georgina was still but a child, secure in her early innocence, not yet grown up to encounter the cares and seductions of the world: and, full of anguish as the dream was, she knew that God had sent it to her in His mercy.

She rose quietly, the perspiration still streaming down her face from the mental pain she had undergone. Mr. Chenevix had long left the house. One attendant only was in the room, and she was fast asleep in the easy-chair. Slipping on a warm covering, Mrs. Vereker stole to Georgina's room. Poor little innocent face! it was white now, and its eyes were closed, sleeping calmly the sleep of death. They had already prepared her for the grave; not to be disturbed again until she should be moved to her coffin.

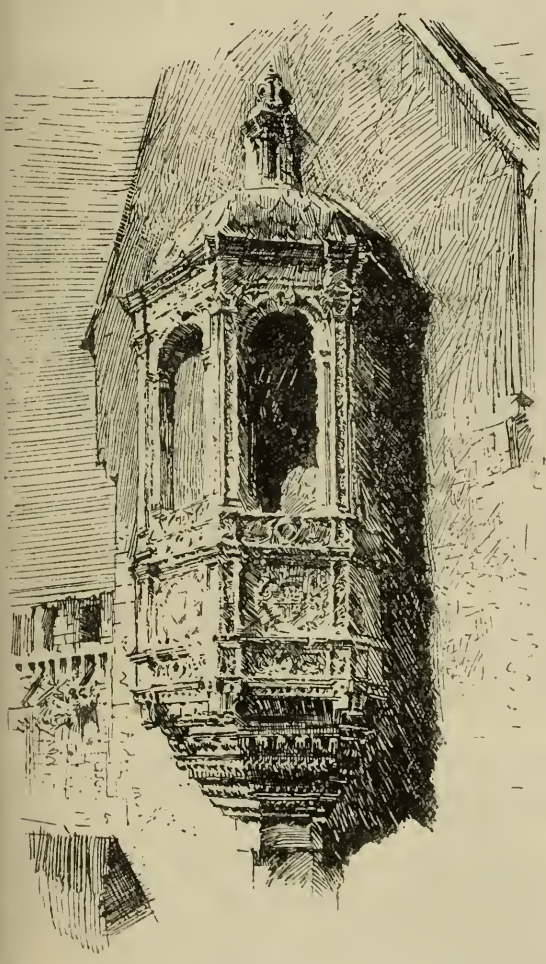
Mrs. Vereker looked at her, as well as she could look for the tears. Not with the rebellious feelings of the former hours, but with a spirit of gratitude and thankfulness, although she knew that all her interest in life was over. Silently she sank upon her knees at the bed-side, and once more ANOTHER prayer went up to God's throne:

"Father! Father! pardon me for my unteachable spirit, that would have rebelled against Thee. Give me strength to bear patiently this affliction that Thou hast seen fit to send; and enable me, enable all Thy creatures here, under whatsoever chastening of Thine, to say,

'THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH, AS IT IS IN HEAVEN.'"

# THE BRETONS AT HOME.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "Letters from Majorca," etc. etc.



Vitré.

ONCE more, my reader, it is necessary to take a long flight. On this occasion we leave the department of the Finistère, so rich in its ancient monuments and remarkable towns, and entering Ille-et-Vilaine, alight in Vitré, undoubtedly the most wonderful and interesting town in the whole of Brittany: one of the few remaining towns of Europe in which, as in Nuremberg, Dantzig and one or two more, you seem absolutely to breathe the atmosphere and receive the true impression of the Middle Ages. No town in Brittany will bear comparison with Vitré. It stands absolutely alone; is the place above all others that must not be passed over. Like the other mediæval towns of Europe, it alone is worth a journey for inspection; and from its wonderful houses and ancient streets you will receive a lifelong impression scarcely to be equalled in this nineteenth century.

We entered Vitré one evening when the shadows were lengthening. Alighting at the Hôtel des Voyageurs, we found ourselves in very comfortable quarters. As elsewhere in Brittany, there was no pretence to luxury and refinement. The stairs were carpetless, the floor of the salle-à-manger was sanded, the bedrooms were large, and so far superior to those of Guingamp, but barely furnished. From our second-floor windows, however, we obtained a wonderful view of mediæval roofs, such as we had never seen, upon which the gloaming

threw deep tones, whilst the darkening sky above looked very far off and very peaceful.

We were waited upon by an extraordinary old woman, who had passed into the garrulous age, and was willing to talk on for ever. Age and the fine muslin cap she wore combined to make her picturesque. She must have been nearly eighty, but still moved with the activity of youth. The proprietor of the inn we never saw; he may have been away on a journey: but madame and her daughter were very much in evidence. They kept the bureau and affected fashionable costumes, but were very nice and obliging.

Table d'hôte being over, we dined in solitary state, as we had dined at Guingamp. We had the whole room to ourselves: a long narrow room, and the substantial *chaussures* of the maid who waited upon us echoed upon the sanded floor. She was the most stolid waiting-maid we met with in all Brittany; a smile seemed impossible to her, and apparently she had never laughed. Her fiery red hair glowed under a white Brittany cap that fitted closely to the head. But her face was refined and almost ladylike, and atoned for a great deal. The dishes were passed from the kitchen through a square opening in the wall, and as that was at one end of the room and we were at the other, the heavy pas-seul executed by the maid was seldom silent.

We had not long been settled before an incident happened to one of us which vividly brought before us one of Mr. Pickwick's humorous adventures in a modified form.

We had scarcely sat down to the table before H. C. made the interesting discovery that he had left his pocket-handkerchief upstairs. "Another pilgrimage," said he. "What is the number of our room?"

"No. 5," I replied. "You will easily find it."

He departed, and presently returned, looking very flushed and nervous.

"What is the matter?" I asked, as he sat down in silence. "You look as if you had met with an unpleasant adventure."

"I have," he replied. "It has put me out very much. I don't altogether like practical joking."

"Who has been victimizing you?" I enquired.

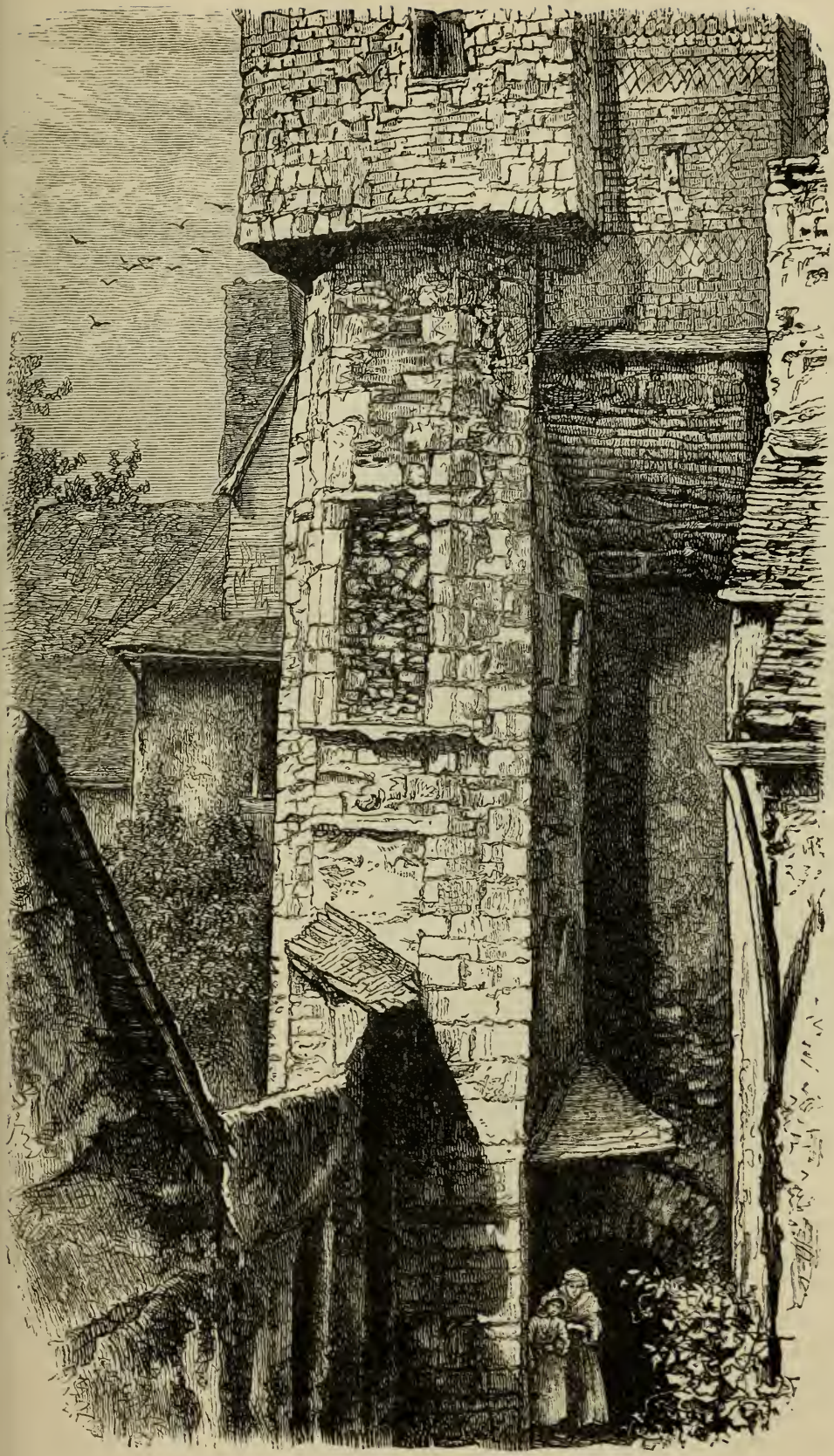
"You have," he answered; "unless," he added, "you made a mistake. In which case I apologise."

"But what have I done? What has happened?"

"Why, you told me the number of our room was 5; instead of which it is 15."

"Well?"

"Not well at all," he returned. "Decidedly bad. I walked unsuspectingly into No. 5, and closed the door behind me before I knew where I was. And there, at the dressing table was an antiquated lady, very much en demie-toilette, with no hair upon her



VITRÉ.

head, arranging a flaxen wig on a block. I really don't know which looked the most comical, the block or the lady's head—they were so much alike. As soon as she saw me she gave a fearful shriek. Did you hear a shriek down here?"

"No," I replied. "I heard nothing."

"Then there must be some truth in the French proverb," he said: "'Ventre affamé n'a point d'oreilles.' For you might have heard the scream at the railway station. Well, she gave a shriek, wrapped up her head in a towel in a twinkling, threw a hair-brush at me, and cried 'Maudit vaurien, allez-vous-en!' I have not the slightest doubt she'll make a fuss and complain to the landlord. Coming out of the room I tumbled over our old chambermaid. 'Ciel!' she cried, 'you have never been in there? That's Mademoiselle Virginie Pichon. A very saintly lady, but very straitlaced. The veriest old maid in all Vitré, for all she poses as a juvenile.' 'And she had no hair on her head,' I said. 'I was quite frightened.' The old woman looked frightened too. 'You saw her without her wig! She'll never forgive you! What brought you in her room?' 'I believed it was mine,' I said. 'I thought our number was 5.' 'It is 15, not 5, and on the second floor. This is the first floor,' said the old woman. 'You will have Mdlle. Virginie for a mortal enemy. A good thing she can't work you much harm in twenty-four hours.' But now," concluded H. C., "what made you tell me our room was No. 5?"

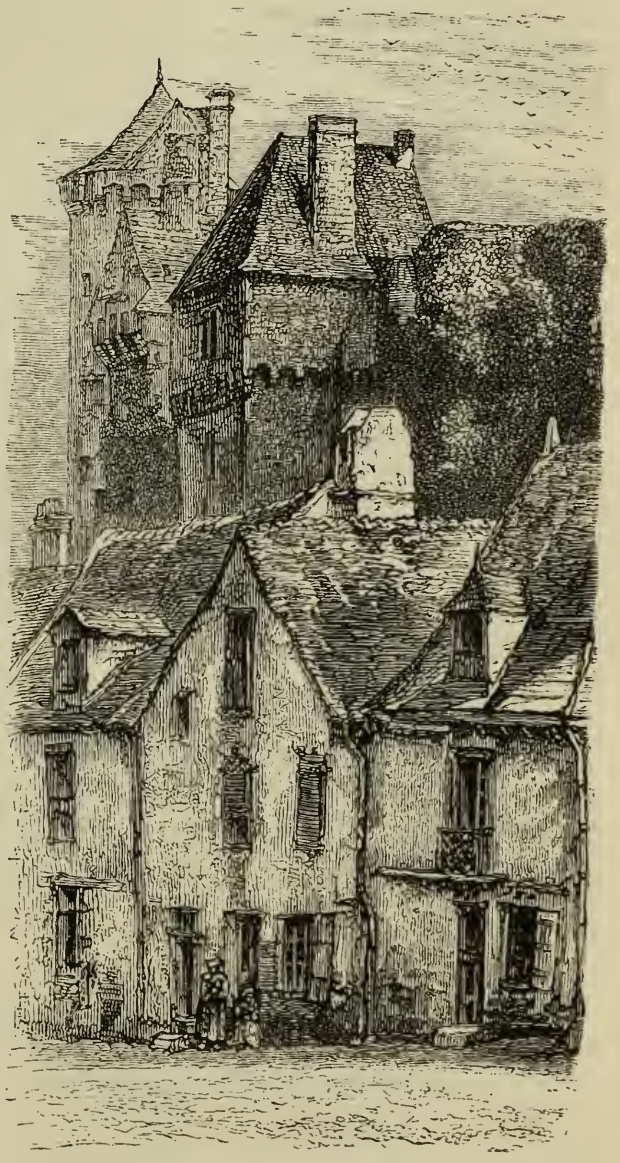
"It was simply a mistake," I replied. "I don't see that much harm has been done. Any one may enter a wrong room in an hotel. You must be very civil to Mdlle. Pichon when you meet her: put on one of your soft glances, and pretend to admire her."

"You mean I must fly off in an opposite direction," said H. C. "That is what I should certainly do."

And then he turned to, and restored his depressed nervous system by an excellent repast. We endeavoured to draw our waiting-maid into conversation, both to listen to her peculiar French and as a study of Breton character; but it was extremely difficult to get her beyond monosyllables. In vain we tried her upon the town, the neighbourhood, the hotel, the people; every topic fell flat, and brought forth no response. Yet she had a well-formed head under her close-fitting cap, and was evidently intended to be intelligent. She looked like one who had at some time received a severe shock, from which she had never recovered; but the expression of the eyes, instead of being startled, was heavy and dreamy. Even when three young soldiers came in towards the end of dinner for their own repast, her countenance showed no gleam of pleasure. Military ardour was evidently not strong within her, and for her the military element had no charms. These three young men were ordinary soldiers, but, as appeared from their manner and conversation, gentlemen. They were quartered upon the town for the time being, and took their meals at the hotel

en pension. They, too, tried to draw our handmaiden into conversation, but without more success than ourselves.

"We are not Bretons," said one of them to us. "They would find that out by the cut of our faces and our accent, if they did not know it already. It is astonishing how clannish they are, these Bretons, and how unwilling to admit outsiders to their hearths and homes by ties of marriage. I have no doubt this grave young woman has a lover with whom she walks out of a Sunday, becomes as gay as a lark, and to whom she has vowed eternal fidelity. Ay, and means it too; I will say that for them. They are as constant and firm in their affections as Romeo and Juliet—without the romance, bien entendu. Many of them would die for each other. Say, Euphrosyne," to the maid, who was on the other side of the table reaching some maccaroons for our benefit: "tell us whether you have not a lover to whom you are devoted, and are one of these days to be the best of wives to."



VITRÉ.

Euphrosyne showed signs of life and emotion for the first time; she coloured slightly and her eyes brightened; but it was rather the emotion of pride than of "maiden modesty" or shyness.

"Here is my gage d'amour," she said, her tongue unloosening for the first time, whilst she drew a narrow ribbon from the bosom of her dress. To this was fastened the half of a ten-franc gold piece.

"My Jules has the other half," she said. He is second waiter

at the Hôtel de France. Next year he will probably be head waiter, for the present head waiter is going to set up for himself in a café, and they have promised my Jules to succeed him. Then we shall be married, and I shall probably transfer myself to the other hotel."

"I told you so," cried the soldier to us, whose name we found was Lamartine: "I told you so. Just fancy this stolid and melancholy maiden going about with a gage d'amour worn next her heart. 'Vraiment on ne connait pas son monde!' But for once we have drawn her out. I never before heard her put ten words together. It is a triumph. You are strangers in Vitré," he added politely. "Come here to reconnoitre, and make acquaintance with the deserted streets and tumbledown houses. I pity you. Though I suppose you are not like us—you may leave by the next train if it pleases you. We must serve our time, bon gré, mal gré, or take the consequences."

We remarked that we had heard much of Vitré, and expected to be highly gratified.

Lamartine shrugged his shoulders. "Every one to his taste," he said. "For me these gloomy streets and gabled roofs have no attraction. They may be very poetical, but they are not lively. I prefer modern to mediæval charms. Give me the Paris boulevards, with their cafés and all their stir and movement. One evening at the Porte St. Martin with Sarah Bernhardt is worth a hundred in such a place as this—short as life is. Not that I have no sympathy with Brittany," he added, "for my mother was a Breton; and my great-grandmother and Madame de Sévigné, who lived at Les Rochers, near here, were most intimate friends. I have heard many an anecdote of Madame de Sévigné—of her charms of manner and conversation. Her name was a household word chez nous. My father is half Norman, half Provençal—a strange mixture, from whom I inherit at once my dark complexion and my love of life and movement and the Paris boulevards. My mother belonged to the family of the de Kernénevots, and her ancestors were Knight-Templars and took part in the Crusades.—And they call this soldiering," he remarked, quaintly looking down at his uniform with a certain compassion. "This uniform instead of the mailed armour, the helmets and visors, the Red Cross Knights of those days; get the picture thoroughly into your mind; and then turn and look at this poor figure."

"But what about the Paris boulevards?" we asked him. "You would not have had them in the days of the Crusades."

"True," he laughed. "That is le revers de la médaille. Everything has its compensations. Yes: I prefer the present time and the boulevards; and would rather be living now than in those days of chivalry. The sooner I am away from Vitré and back in civilised life, the better I shall like it. Gentlemen," he added, filling his

VITRÉ.

glass and rising, "let us trinquer. We are of different nations; but I see that we should be good friends if our lines ran side by side. A votre santé."

There was something very frank and winning about Lamartine. His enthusiasm was refreshing, and his straightforward friendliness was delightful. We felt as if we had known him for months rather than moments. His high spirits were infectious, and we filled a bumper and drank to his health with all the *camaraderie* that he displayed. His companions, though probably much in the same rank of life, were much more quiet and silent.

We went up to our room, taking care this time to reach the second floor and No. 15. The garrulous old woman was bustling about, giving the last finishing touch for the night. As soon as she saw us, she lifted her hands and closed her eyes with every expression of horror.

"Ah, monsieur! your friend has done for himself with Mdlle. Pichon!" she cried, her eyes now opening to their full extent. "The poor lady has been in hysterics almost ever since, and declares she will have the law of him. You see, no one has ever had the pleasure of viewing her without her wig. She always locks her door, and this evening, par malheur, she forgot it. She is rather bouleversée to-day; she went to confession this morning, and I believe the priest has denied her melted butter for a month. She is very fond of sauce blanche, monsieur, and has often said to me: 'Voyez-vous, Sophonisbe—je m'appelle Sophonisbe aprés ma marraine —voyez-vous, Sophonisbe, les tripes à la sauce blanche, et une salade de pomme de terre; il n'y a rien de meilleur au paradis.' And now, poor thing, that she has been seen without her wig, she is heart-broken. She thinks it will get all over the town, and is afraid that it will reach the ears of an old capitaine de marine en retraite, who is paying her attentions for the sake of her comfortable rente. Poor silly old woman! as if any one could fall in love with her at her age! I might just as well think of getting married again myself, with my eighty years."

"Tell Mdlle. Pichon," said H.C., really distressed, "that I will be as secret as the grave. Tell her that we don't know a soul in the place, and that we leave on Monday. Tell her that I was greatly struck with her charming expression, and should much like to take a sketch of her. I think that will appease her," he added, turning to me; "it is astonishing the amount of flattery these ancient ladies are capable of receiving."

We went down, leaving Sophonisbe—these fine names seemed as plentiful in this part of Brittany as stars in the Milky Way—to her occupations. As we passed the bureau, madame was seated in full evidence at her ledger, counting up her profits, perhaps; her daughter was at the table behind her, gracefully bending over some delicate embroidery. It was really very fine and intricate work, and she

spread it out before us with some pride, saying that it was to decorate one of the garments of Monsieur le Curé. We were discreet, and did not enquire which garment.

"You do not know Vitré?" said madame, politely putting down her pen and rising to the occasion. "You have a treat before you if you are fond of mediæval architecture. It is one of the few towns remaining almost in its integrity. And to-night you will have a full moon, which makes so much difference to the effect. I know nothing that can equal Vitré by moonlight.—Ah, monsieur, you are the culprit," turning to H.C. "That poor Mdlle. Pichon is in despair. You may not believe it, but as a young woman she was almost a beauty. She has shrivelled up wonderfully this last year or two, but vanity is the hardest thing for a woman to live down. Yes, I always say it. It forms part of our nature. I have still some of it left, myself," laughed madame, who, well dressed and well preserved, was still a very comely personage: an older edition of the fair daughter who sat behind her, and who, in looking at her mother might see what in twenty years' time she would come to.

It was very dark as we passed out into the night. There were lamps gleaming here and there, in this more modern part of the town, but they only seemed to render the darkness more visible. If the moon had risen, she was still behind the houses and did not give her light.

Turning to the left, we quickly passed out of the new world into the old. Our sight grew accustomed to the darkness, and very soon the whole wonderful aspect of the place stood out before us, the very embodiment of the past, a perfect dream of antiquity and mediævalism. All the towns in Brittany paled before this monument of a bygone age. Morlaix, with all its charms, was as nothing compared with Vitré. In the darkness it almost seemed as if the houses, house after house and street after street, might have been, not hundreds but thousands of years old. Apparently the hand of man had left them untouched for centuries. The streets are irregularly built, but this only adds to their picturesqueness. By this light, Vitré looked almost like a huge and romantic mass of ruins. Almost we expected the whole structure to fall to the ground. It seemed a magician's vision raised by a stroke of the wand, frail and intangible, that would in like manner disappear.

The houses were raised in projecting storeys, so that from many an upper floor neighbours might almost have shaken hands and paid each other morning calls by stepping across from one window to the other. The roofs were deeply gabled, frequently overhanging, deepening the gloom, darkening the street. Many of the streets were made still more gloomy by arcades, low and massive, where surely the sun never penetrates. Gas lamps in the streets were unknown, but here and there an oil-lamp, slung from opposite houses, cast a few uncertain rays abroad, and added to the surrounding darkness.

When we first went out lights gleamed from many an ancient lattice, but as the night drew on these gradually disappeared. Evidently the Vitré folk went early to bed, like so many of the wise Bretons. But these lighted lattices were wonderfully effective. Numbers of them, like the houses themselves, were quite out of the perpendicular, and the lights gleaming through the small panes cast strange shadows around, with weird effect, showing up and increasing all their wonderful antiquity. It almost seemed as if, behind these lighted lattices, the people themselves must be centuries old, living the primitive life of the middle ages. Modern refinement and appliances seemed impossibly out of place here. Almost we expected to see a crowd of figures approaching with the ruffles, farthingales and high head-dresses of the Elizabethan era. The streets ought to have been given up to such a picturesque mob ; everything would have been in good keeping and character ; the effect would have left nothing to be desired. But the streets were empty, the windows untenanted. Here and there, where for a moment man or woman approached a lattice, they were very tame and commonplace compared with the beings our imagination had conjured up.

Presently the moon rose above the houses, large and silvery and round as a shield. The effect of this old-world town was infinitely intensified. The light thrown upon the houses was pale and cold ; the light of a dead world, as it were, shining upon the world of a past age, without warmth or power to restore it to animation. The gabled outlines shone out clear and distinct against the sky. The rough stones in the street came out in vivid relief. The lights and shadows were multiplied, the gabled outlines falling athwart the walls. Now the quaint lattices were lighted up from without, and, where they caught the moon's rays, reflected them with a pale and beautiful shimmer. Within the houses all was still and silent and quiet as in that dead world that was riding through the heavens, and is said to rule our winds and waves, and century after century—cold monarch of the night that she is—has listened unmoved to the passionate vows of lovers, and seen without emotion the last moments of the despairing.

We wandered long about the streets of Vitré. It was impossible to leave this wonderful world, lighted up by a "divine effulgence." Even in Nuremberg we had seen nothing like this, for there the town is large and the streets are wide, and the ancient houses have not the ghostly effect of Vitré. They are mediæval houses well preserved. They still have an abundance of youth about them. The modern men and women hurrying through its streets, to and from the factories where so many of the toys are made that gladden the hearts of the world's children, do not look so very out of place. It is the town of a past age, full of present life and activity : full of charm, but not full of romance and poetry. Vitré, on the contrary, is the very embodiment of both. As we walked its streets that night, lighted up by

that silvery moonlight, we felt that we were breathing their very atmosphere. Even the chivalrous elements were not wanting,

VITRÉ BY MOONLIGHT.

for presently we came upon the old Castle of Vitré, and its massive walls and towers, its splendid gateway, looked as if they

would defy time itself. Clearly outlined in the pale moonlight, it seemed ready to defy the armies of the world. Its impression upon the imagination was in direct contrast with the ancient houses. These seemed in the very last stage of life, ready, like a mummy just exposed to the air, to crumble to dust at the first touch of a finger. The castle, on the other hand, stood as firm and upright and entire as in the first moments of its youth.

That youth dated to days long past—the days of the eleventh century. Very little of that first period remains. The greater portion was rebuilt in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the finest period of military architecture in Brittany. It remains a magnificent monument of that age, and possesses a great number of towers and turrets with conical roofs. The gateway, approached by a drawbridge, is a Gothic archway, massive, venerable, imposing; and as part of the castle has become the prison, it has, no doubt, struck terror to the heart of many a culprit.

Passing through the gateway, you reach an immense courtyard, where are the remains of an ancient collegiate church, the tomb, in the days gone by, of the ancient Barons of Vitré. Close to the prison is a charming Renaissance turret, richly decorated with arabesques, small figures, shields and quarterings. The base bears the inscription: "Post tenebras spero lucem," taken from the Book of Job, and supposed to allude to the persecutions suffered by the Seigneurs de la Trémouille, who were of the Reformed Faith, and suffered accordingly. This elegant construction is said to have served as a pulpit.

We wandered round the castle walls in the moonlight, admiring their gigantic proportions, their immense strength. A sharp descent brought us to a stream bordered by low, picturesque buildings; sheds and storehouses built floor above floor in the most delightful irregularity, the massive walls and round towers of the castle looking down upon all in frowning magnificence.

Yet all this fell short of the ancient houses themselves, the wonderful streets with their narrowness, their gloom, and their mysterious impenetrability. Standing at the commencement of one of these streets, you could trace the gabled roofs in a long row, one after the other; broken here and there, perhaps, by a house ending in a turret-like arrangement, the roof slanting upwards almost to a fine point, and giving room for two or three dormer windows, one above the other. Gloom and mystery and depth hung over all. A death-in-life sort of feeling took possession of us as we gazed—fascinating, yet not without awe. We could not tear ourselves away from it, yet felt as if we were in the midst of a gigantic graveyard, surrounded by phantoms. When midnight rang out upon the air with slow and measured strokes, we started at this announcement of the witching hour, and looked around for the army of ghosts to put on visible form. We felt them about us, but they remained

unseen. It was evidently not one of their high festivals, or any occasion on which they manifested themselves to the world of which they once formed a part.

A very earthly apparition we did presently come upon after the town clocks had struck midnight. Nearing the end of one of the narrow streets—one of the oldest, most gloomy and most weird, where the houses seemed to have been thrown together, and were of all shapes and sizes and in every state of decrepitude; nearing the end of this old street, we perceived a glimmer of light that shot out from a low casement and rested against the opposite dead wall. At this point the passage was so narrow that neither sun nor moon could penetrate unless directly overhead. This narrow stream of light only made more profound the surrounding darkness.

"A weaver at his loom," said H. C. "Or a student at his books, wasting the midnight oil."

"Or an alchemist searching for the Philosopher's Stone," we chimed in. "Or a witch boiling her kettle like Norna, and selling men's destinies as she sold the winds."

But it was none of these. When we came up to the window, which was wide and latticed, and might well have seen five centuries in and out, we gazed upon a curious apparition. Beneath the window was a large dough-trough. A young man was bending over it, kneading dough with all his might and main. He looked a singular object. His hair was black and bushy, his face was pale as death, and his eyes, black as sloes, looked large and luminous as he glanced up and saw our faces peering upon him. Immediately he grinned, showing a set of white teeth, even and regular. He was stripped to the waist, and altogether looked very much like a handsome savage. Very little else was in the shed, whose bare black walls were lighted by a solitary flickering torch. The man's figure stood out in wonderful relief.

He was apparently giving the finishing touch to his dough: a huge quantity, evidently to be presently made into loaves. It seemed hard work, and his fists went in and out of it and turned it over with the force of sledge hammers. The exercise was apparently healthful, for his muscles were extraordinarily developed. With a final pat, a final turnover, he pushed it to the end of the trough, and there left it to rise—or whatever the proper technical term may be for the operation. Then he threw open the window.

"Your servitor, sirs! I cannot ask you in to take a chair," he cried, "for you see I have none to offer you; and I fear that if you sat upon the trough you would carry away with you too many of the marks of my trade. You are late out, to-night, sirs. Even the owls and the bats must have gone to bed. Not that we are much troubled here with either one or the other. I have seen and heard and caught them often enough in the woods of Les Rochers, where I spent many a day and night of my childhood."

"If we are out late, your are working late," we returned. "It seems hard work, too."

"Bakers, like burglars, must work by night," he said. "We must go to bed late and wake up early, and even then we are not always sure of our batch. Sometimes it is just as if the oven were bewitched: everything seems as usual, yet the loaves come out as if the devil's imps had been sitting upon them. On those days our customers grumble, and I have to tell them that if they are not pleased they had better come and make it themselves. I am not the *patron*, you understand, sirs, only his nephew. He pays me just like an ordinary workman, but he is old and has no children, so when he dies I shall come into his business."

"You must not be looking out for dead men's shoes," said H. C. "People who do so are generally disappointed."

Our baker shrugged his shoulders. "I am not exactly doing that," he laughed. "I don't want him to die because I am coming into his business. But one must make one's calculations, and see a little of what lies before one in the future. My uncle has had his day—I want to have mine. Rose-Marie, the daughter of M. Kernac, who is perruquier to the best families about, has promised to marry me as soon as we can settle into our furniture; but I know well her father would send me tramping if I hadn't the prospect of this business before me."

"That is why you work so hard?" said H. C.

"Dame, oui; that is partly the reason. Of course I have some sense of duty also. I am not a bad sort. My uncle has been good to me; he partly brought me up; I wish to do my best for him."

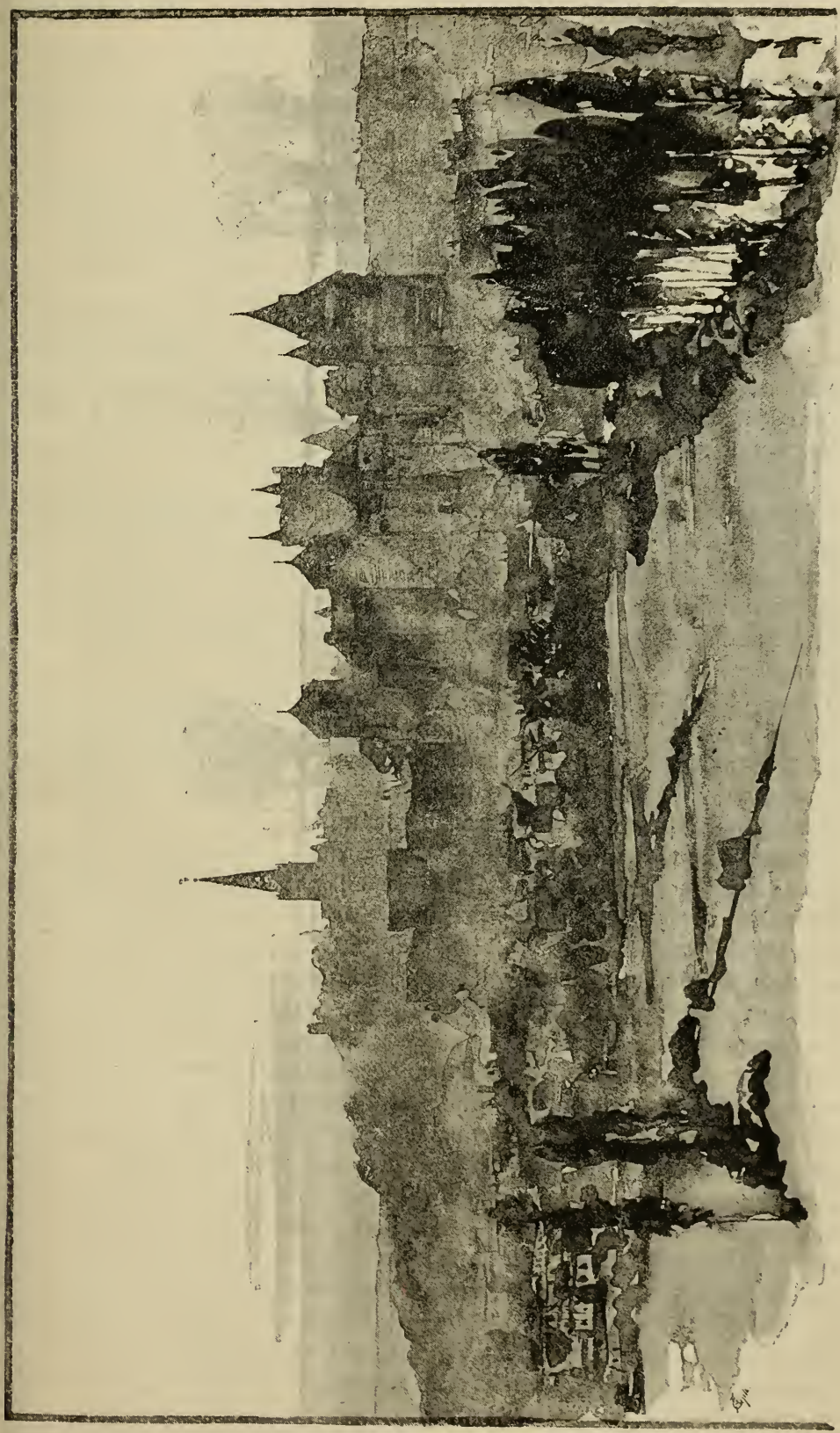
"You live in a wonderful old town," said H. C., who thought the surrounding antiquities more interesting than the baker's uncle.

"Ay, wonderful enough," returned the young man. "It is as old as Pierrot, but not half so funny, and it is as lively as a sepulchre. If it wasn't for Rose-Marie and the business I would go off to Paris to-morrow and take a place on the boulevards. Would you like to have a coup-d'œil of the town by moonlight—see all the tops of the houses, follow all the lines of the steets?"

"How can it be done?" we asked.

"Easily enough. You see that building," pointing to a tower-like erection which raised its conical head far above the surrounding houses. "It is empty, and I have the key of the door. I will light a candle, and we can grope up the rickety old staircase. It is worth while."

No sooner said than done. He took up a candle stuck in a flat piece of wood, and a box of matches, and vaulted over the trough and out of the window as lightly as an acrobat. All this time he had been talking as we found him; but now he had struggled into an old knitted jersey, and led the way to the tower. Applying a ponderous key to an equally huge keyhole, the rusty lock turned in its wards and the



VITRÉ BY MOONLIGHT.

door on its creaking hinges. Inside everything was dark as Erebus.

"I hope we are not going to be murdered," said H. C., making a slight pause. "This young Hercules is quite capable of treating us as he does his dough. There may be a black pit at our feet; a well, perhaps, dry and fathomless. A bird's-eye view of Vitré by moonlight is hardly worth our lives. Think of the poetic loss to mankind if anything happened to me. It is too disastrous to contemplate."

"Or to happen," I said, as the baker struck a light and invited us to enter.

"Do not be afraid, sirs," he cried, as though he had understood H. C.'s words. "No harm will come to you here. If the rats look out upon you they will be more frightened of you than you of them. I have seen them scamper of by the dozen sometimes, when I have come in unexpectedly."

"What is the mystery of this place?" we asked.

"Not much mystery," he replied. "This was supposed to have been built as a sort of watch-tower in the days gone by. But it is so old and uncomfortable that no one will live in it, and now it has long been abandoned to ruin and the rats. Not that these walls will soon fall," he added, tapping the solid masonry as he began to mount the staircase.

It was old and decaying; and whatever the walls might do, would certainly not outlive another generation. But we managed to reach the top; and if the rats had been holding reverie at our approach, our entrance had certainly frightened them away. We saw no black eyes wickedly peering at us, nor heard any scamper.

Once at the top, our trouble was rewarded. The scene before us was beautiful and unearthly. The town lay in the hushed repose of midnight. Perhaps of all its inhabitants we only were abroad. The moon threw her light upon all: a pale, silvery light in which everything was steeped. The sea of roofs beneath us, quaint and gabled, shone out almost as clearly as by day. We easily traced the windings of the irregular streets, with their deep shadows. The castle walls with their towers and turrets looked frowning and portentous; and within the courtyard, a sentinel with gun and bayonet paced to and fro, keeping guard over the prisoners. Beyond it, in the pale moonlight, the river flashed jewels which rivalled the far-off stars. The distant country was lost in obscurity; we listened for a sound and heard only the baying of a dog, disturbed probably by the mysterious moon. The solemnity of midnight was over all: that feeling of death-in-nature, which creeps over us all in the small hours, and is only dispelled when dawn breaks in the East. Most wonderful of all were the roofs of the town, shining out white and cold and clear, the shadows silently shifting as the moon rode upwards. It looked like a ruined city. The roofs were of every conceivable shape and form, though the greater number were gabled, and the overhanging

eaves threw deep shadows upon walls and windows. In very rare exceptions a casement was still lighted from within, where a late watcher was perhaps keeping vigil by a sick-bed; or a maiden, not fancy-free, was arranging some finery to gladden the eyes of her lover on the morrow. For the morrow was Sunday; or, rather, Sunday had been heralded in with the last stroke of midnight.

"Where lives M. Kernac?" asked H. C., always deeply interested in the loves of every modern Corydon and Phyllis.

"Just about there," replied the baker, pointing to the middle of a narrow street, about two hundred yards away. "It is all in darkness. My lady sleeps. May her dreams be pleasant—and of me."

"You are very devoted to Rose-Marie," said H. C., with the proper amount of sentiment in his tone.

"She is very pretty, and amiable—and she is very fond of me," returned the swain, with straightforward simplicity.

"Her name is Rose-Marie; what is yours?" asked H. C.

"I am called Antoine. But, although Saint Antoine is my patron saint, I don't much care for him. He was fond of pigs, and pigs are my aversion."

The time wore on, and one o'clock struck upon the air. It awoke us to a sense of the fitness of things. We turned our gaze from the sleeping town; Antoine relighted his candle, and we safely accomplished our perilous descent. Antoine vaulted back into his bakery, wished us good-night, closed his window and disappeared. We followed his example, and soon found ourselves crossing the Place to the hotel.

Madame was still in her bureau at her books, but Mademoiselle had disappeared to court that beauty sleep which only comes before midnight. We exclaimed at Madame's late vigil, and hoped we had not kept her up.

"I never retire before one o'clock," replied Madame; "so that I am not so very much behind my usual time. I am the last up in my hotel, and I think I may say, as a rule, the last up in Vitré. I find that from eleven to one is the only quiet time I can give to my books, when I am pretty safe from interruption. You are late, messieurs. You have found Vitré by moonlight a new experience. Did I not tell you you would be enchanted?

We answered that Madame was a true prophet, but that we should have been less late if Antoine, the baker, had not beguiled us into going up the tower.

"Comment!" cried Madame; "that restless Antoine took you up that crazy old building! That man is impossible! I suppose you found him making his bread. He might as well make it in the middle of the market place. I always declare that if he does not put up the shutters, one of these days he will be found murdered in his own trough."

We hoped better things of Vitré.

"There are bad people everywhere," returned Madame. "There are tramps loose who ought to be in prison for life, to keep them out of mischief; and everywhere there are a certain number of people who commit wickedness for the mere love of it. These people are mad; they are the offspring, perhaps, of generations of ill-doers. With them, crime is a disease, for which, poor things, they deserve our profound compassion. But it is Sunday morning," added Madame, closing her ledger and politely changing a yawn into a spasmodic smile; "let us rather think of the good than of the bad. Let us hope that Antoine will put up his shutters and escape his doom, or else that I am not a true prophet in this instance. He is really a bon garçon as times go, and he and his Rose-Marie have a fair prospect before them. You have been enchanted with Vitré by moonlight, messieurs; I assure you that you will like it equally by daylight. Its charms are not of those that cannot bear inspection."

So we indeed found. The next morning rose bright and cloudless. When we went down we found Madame bustling about in partial déshabille, but with as much energy as if she retired every night with the fowls.

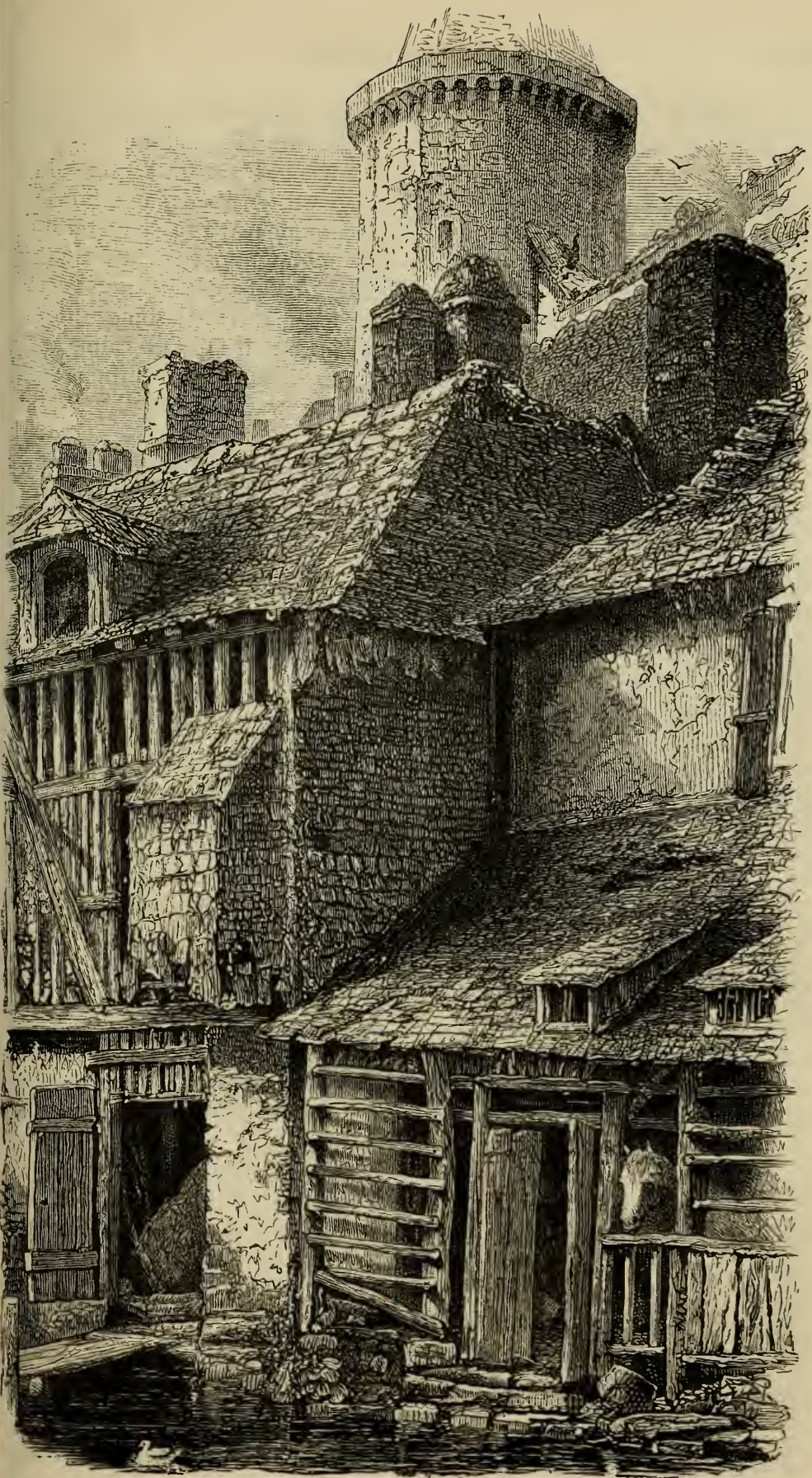
"Now for Vitré by daylight," she said, as we passed into a small, uncomfortable, sanded room for our morning coffee. "Last night you had the town in a general effect; to-day you will have it in detail; some people prefer one, some the other."

"The impression of a general effect is more lasting," we observed.

"That is my opinion," returned Madame; "and my experience also. If ever I go for a stroll through the streets of Vitré, it is at ten o'clock at night when the moon is at the full. But you must also visit Les Rochers to-day, the old château of Madame de Sévigné. It is only a short drive from the town. If it pleases you, I will have a carriage ready for you at half-past ten. This will give you an hour or two in Vitré before starting."

It was so arranged, and we went out without further parlance, to make the most of the early hours.

We found Vitré no less wonderful than we had thought it last night. The streets had put on their Sunday quiet, and the only people at present abroad were those who were hurrying to or from mass. The mediæval atmosphere was almost more apparent by day than by night. There seemed little or nothing to contradict or disturb the impression in the heart of the old town. Nothing could be more picturesque than this succession of ancient gables, so clearly defined against the background of sky. Of this sky, in many a street only a narrow strip could be seen, so closely did the overhanging eaves approach each other. Everywhere there were deep lights and shadows. There was many a quaint and slanting roof, with dormer windows standing one above another. And many a lattice looked as though an attempt to open it would bring it to the ground. The arcades were heavy, and added to the old-world influence, reminding



VITRÉ.

one so much of some of the old towns of Italy and the East. But here there was no southern warmth and life and excitement. The deep lights and shadows cast where the sun could penetrate were cold; they were in no way associated with luxuriant vineyards, and flowing wine, and dark-eyed, impetuous men and women. The vendetta was unknown; no gallant's blood stained the midnight pavement from the hand of the jealous rival; no serenade might be heard beneath a lady's balcony. The influences here are more holy and wholesome; life is not made up of passion and flame and froth; it is more calm, and duties are thought of and fulfilled, religious sentiment is strong, and many are quietly working in their humble way towards the "one far-off, divine event" which must happen to us all.

In the matter of churches Vitré is not rich. Its principal church, Notre Dame, is 15th and 16th century Gothic, and perhaps its most notable point is an outside pulpit of charming design, said by local tradition to have been erected in opposition to the open-air preaching of the Calvinists. The principal doorway is Renaissance. The interior possesses a triptych composed of thirty-two enamels representing scenes from the New Testament, described on the back in an attempt at rhyme.

Not least interesting in Vitré were the many small narrow turnings which ran like ramifications from the principal thoroughfares. They were only a few yards in length, and terminated unexpectedly in square courtyards or enclosures, where some of the oldest houses, some of the most dilapidated lattices, some of the most picturesque slanting roofs and dormer windows were to be found. That anyone could live in them was a wonder, for they were dark and gloomy, shut out, to a great extent, not only from sunlight but from "heaven's pure oxygen." In turning out of one of these later in the day, who should we come upon but our midnight friend, Antoine, accompanied by Rose-Marie. They were leaving her father's shop at the moment, preparatory to a long walk in the woods of Les Rochers. Both were dressed in their best, and looked a very comely pair. They were at life's happiest age, and on both faces happiness predominated. Antoine recognised and saluted us, and presented us, with much pride, to "his Rose-Marie."

"Messieurs are welcome to Vitré," she said very prettily.

"And the next time they visit the old town may there be no Mademoiselle Rose-Marie Kernac in existence," cried Antoine. Rose-Marie blushed. "The little imps sat on my bread last night, if you'll believe me," he laughed. "It doesn't happen twice a year, and yet they must choose Sunday for a bad batch. My uncle is furious."

"It is all because you went courting the owls and disturbing the rats up that wretched tower at midnight. It is they who sit upon your bread, not the devil's imps," laughed Rose-Marie. "Don't go again, Antoine; I am so afraid you will tumble down the staircase

and kill yourself. The last time you had a bad baking hadn't you equally been up the tower?"

"That's true."

"Very well, then. That proves that I am right. If you go up again, after such a warning, there will be no loaves to come out of the oven at all; they will disappear altogether."

And following the example of this dark prophecy, Antoine and Rose-Marie also took their way and disappeared. We watched them down the street: a goodly couple, overflowing with spirits, whom the sad side of life had not yet touched. They were in the golden age.

At half-past ten, true to our appointment, we went back to the inn, where our modest conveyance was waiting for us in the yard. By this time there were a good many people lounging about the Place. Many of them were peasants, who had walked in to spend their "dimanche," as usual, in the mild distractions of the town. Here, for the first time, we saw men wearing their garments of goat skins: a loose blouse or jacket sort of arrangement coming down to the hips, which made them look very much like savages, a few degrees removed from the animal world. Their long hair added to the savage element. Altogether we thought them the most uncomely specimens we had yet seen, and in our after experience of Brittany they were not surpassed.

We took our seats, escorted up the little alley by Madame, who strongly commended us to Jean le cocher, and ordered him to drive carefully, as if we had been made of Dresden china instead of stern flesh and blood. One of us had his usual headache; headaches which have clung to him with the persistency of Fate, and altogether robbed him of the golden age which Antoine and Rose-Marie found so fair. So we called at a chemist's on our way to Les Rochers, and found him a very interesting specimen, grave and learned, with spectacles that magnified his eyes into saucers; yet very sympathetic.

"I have suffered from the affliction," he said, "and I can tell you that there is no cure for it but time. As you near fifty years of age, you will find that they will leave you, and you may then begin to grow strong."

"It will be rather late in the day," we laughed.

"Better late than never," he returned. "With many life really begins at fifty. It is only then that half the great men of the world have commenced to give out in their own way what their mind has been absorbing during the previous thirty years."

"Upon the principle that the best fruits ripen slowly, I suppose?" said H. C., who was evidently wondering what great things he should accomplish at fifty, for he had not yet reached half that age.

"Slow growths are certainly the most healthy," returned the chemist. "Though Madame de Sévigné, to whose Château you are evidently bound, was an exception to the rule. There are always

exceptions to every rule. She was clever and spirituelle from the beginning; her first letters are almost equal to her last. This is the best I can do for you," he added, coming forward with a dose he had carefully mixed.

It acted like magic. Before we left the pharmacy the headache had departed. We expressed our gratitude.

"Ah, but it will come again," he said, philosophically, with a calm smile and a wise shake of the head. "To-morrow, or perhaps the next day, there it will be on its throne. I know it too well."

"But why not give me doses to carry away with me; or the prescription?"

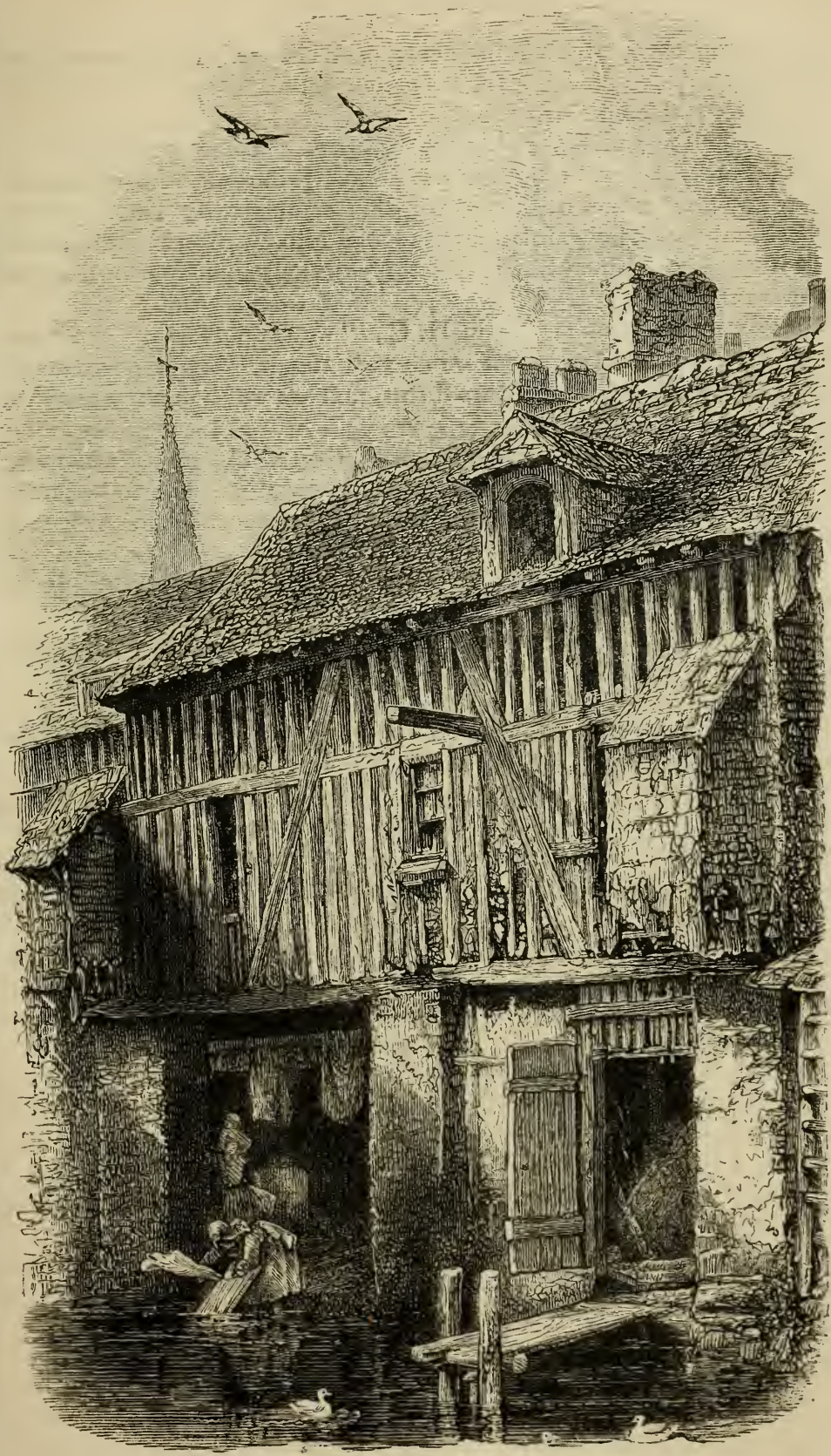
"The medicine will not keep even twenty-four hours," he replied. "As for the prescription, I dare not give it you. It is too dangerous a medicine, entirely a combination of my own, led up to by my own sufferings. But I am glad to have done you good. You will enjoy your drive and the Château des Rochers all the more. If only there were still a Madame de Sévigné to do its honours! But time has a way of flowing on, and events and people pass away; and even for you fifty will one day come."

We left our philosopher to his musings and went our way, which led us through a long, straight, park-like road. The drive was very charming. Trees lined the thoroughfare, and as we approached the Château, the woods on either side grew thick and dense. There were long vistas into shady glens, where many a delightful hour and day might be passed in the companionship of a favourite book; days when the skies overhead were blue, and the sunshine, hot and brilliant, glinted through the branches, and the wild birds sang their songs. Lovely spots for picnics, where to the song of the birds might be added the rippling echoes of free and happy laughter, such as one only hears when *les beaux jours de la vie* are in their meridian. I believe that one of the consolations of age must be that then one realises the true shortness of time, and that man's life, according to the sweet singer of Israel, passeth away as a shadow.

Very soon above the tops of the trees we saw the turrets of the Château of Les Rochers, a spot made classical and historical by the atmosphere of Madame de Sévigné, which will cling to it until the rolling ages shall have left not one stone upon another.

There, on a large plâteau, the huge pile opened up, white and dazzling in the sunshine, with a slanting roof and conical-shaped turrets. We walked down the long pathway, bordered only by an immense green lawn decorated with white posts and chains. There was not a soul within sight anywhere; complete silence met us—a sense of "Sabbath stillness" that must not be disturbed. There was a bell certainly, but we felt that its echoes would painfully startle the air. Was the Château inhabited? If so, would this Sabbath visit not be an intrusion? What was to be done?

Uncertainty is a bad thing. We rang the bell. A distant echo



VITRÉ.

responded; then, for a few moments, dead silence. Then sundry bolts drawn, the door opened, a timid face appeared.

"The gentlemen had rung?"

"Yes. They wished to see the Château, if it were possible."

"I hardly know," returned the woman, who was too amiable to deny anything, if one might judge by her expression. "I hardly know what to say. The gardienne has gone into Vitré to church, and is not yet back again. She is frightfully jealous if anyone but herself shows the Château."

"We have come far," said H. C., "we cannot stay. We much wish to see the Château, and we cherish the memory of Madame de Sévigné. Pray do the honours for us, and we will be as secret as the grave."

"There is no such thing as secrecy. Everything becomes known," replied this philosopher. "As for this Château, I believe that the walls not only have ears but tongues. If we sneeze up in the garret, the next moment it is known in the kitchen."

"It is Sunday; perhaps on that day our visit may be an intrusion?" we remarked.

"Oh no, on the contrary. Sunday is just as convenient as any other day; neither better nor worse."

"Are the family here?" asked H. C.

"Monsieur de Nétumières? Oh, no! If so, it could not be seen on a Sunday. They are all away."

"And you are sole keeper of the Château?"

"For the moment, yes; I am alone," smiled the woman; "but la gardienne will soon be back from church, and if she knew I had shown you over, I should have no peace for three days."

"You need not fear," said H. C. "I am sure she will meet a great many acquaintances, and so be later than usual. Is she not fond of gossip?"

"She is a woman," replied this custodian.

"And she loves scandal?"

"She is a woman," was the reply again, delivered in an inimitable tone.

"And she is devoted to the sterner sex?"

"I tell you she is a woman," for the third time; "therefore, these things go without saying."

"Then I am quite sure you have nothing to fear. These reasons will detain her, and she will be later than usual. To-day Vitré is overflowing with gossip, scandal and the members of the army.

"Can that be true?" asked the woman, anxiously.

"It is a fact not to be questioned," replied H. C.

The woman's face grew sad. "La gardienne has always the luck of it," she said with a sigh. "When it is my turn to go into Vitré, it rains; or there is a sermon, and I have to wait for it; or there is a

fête in a neighbouring village, and everyone I know has gone off to dance and eat gingerbread."

"This is a most interesting conversation, and you are a very charming person, and I could desire nothing better than to go through life at your side," said H. C. mildly; "but I should like to observe that the longer we delay, the more chance there will be of being pounced upon by that ghoul, vampire, gorgon, or whatever other pet name you may have for your Gardienne."

"Enfin! It is impossible to resist monsieur's pleading: those eyes would change ice itself into rivers of water," responded this artful Phyllis, this extremely timid-looking maiden. "It shall be as monsieur wishes. Entrez!"

With that she threw wide the door, and led us through marble corridors and gilded salons and panelled dining-room, where ancient oak groaned under the burden of massive silver, and the walls were lined with portraits of people, most of whom were either ancestors or descendants of the illustrious Madame de Sévigné; many having been illustrious in their own way.

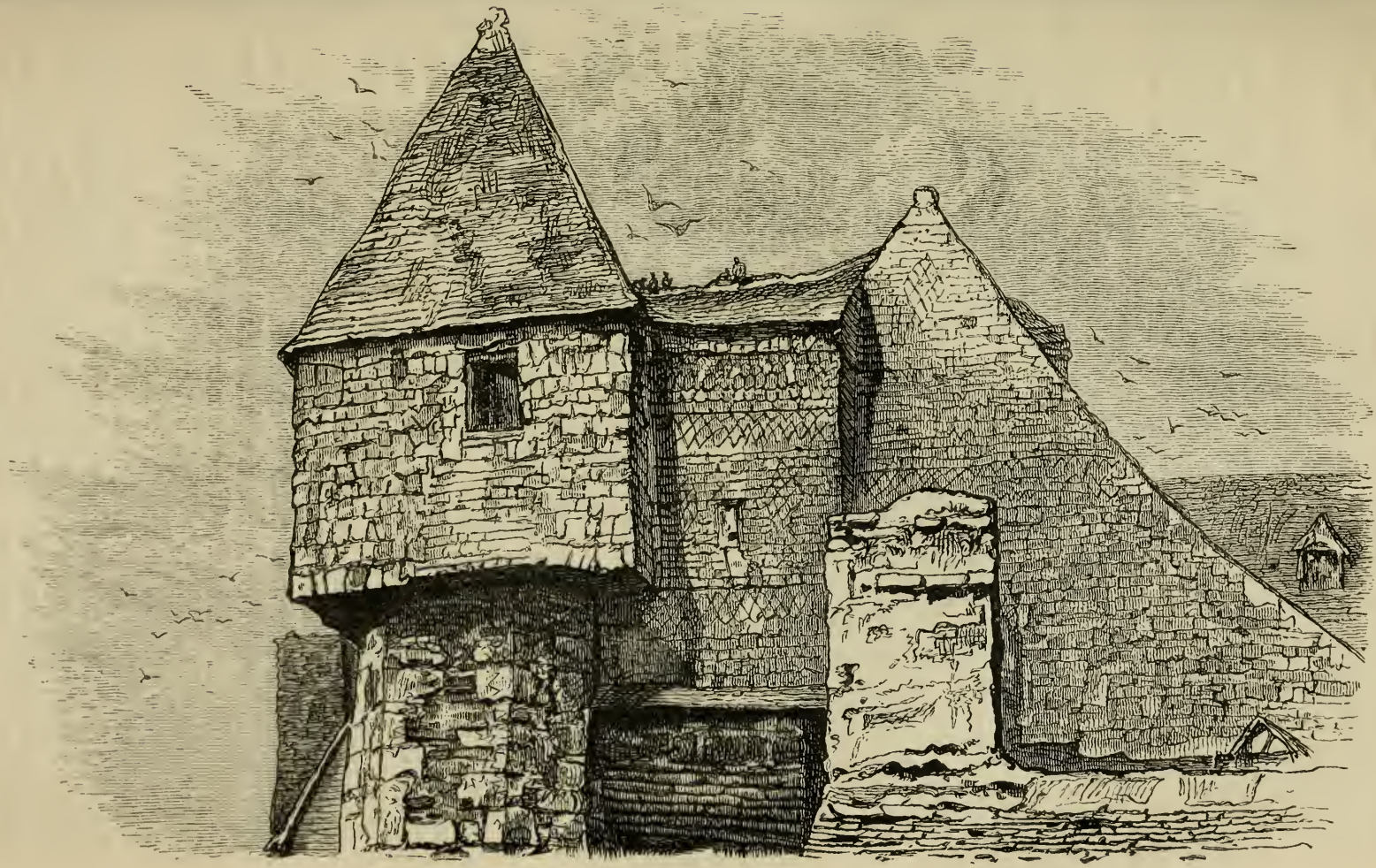
One of the most interesting portraits, attributed to Mignard, was that of Madame de Sévigné herself, very much décolletée, a mantle with large pleats thrown over the shoulders. The face was marked by refinement and that fine, spirituelle expression, which, rather than great beauty, was her charm. Her husband, the Marquis de Sévigné, in his marshal's dress, hung near her. Opposite was her son Charles, celebrated, as many of us know, for his intrigues with the famous Ninon de Lenclos and the fascinating Champmeslé! Again, there was Madame de Grignan, with her amiable and distinguished expression, her face so like her mother's without being quite so spirituelle. It were difficult to match those large, liquid eyes of Madame de Sévigné: though in the portrait of her father, the Baron de Rabutin-Chantal, it was easy to trace from whom the daughter inherited both eyes and intelligence. There was the portrait of Jeanne Françoise Frémyot, surnamed Sainte Chantal, Madame de Sévigné's ancestress, who, in conjunction with St. Francis of Sales, founded the Order of *Les Dames de la Visitation:* one of whose later members was a cousin of Mrs. Henry Wood, who in her youth had charmed her friends by her voice and famous harp playing, only to retire speedily from the world, and for more than fifty years live a life of strict seclusion within convent walls. There was a portrait of Madame de la Fayette, the noted Mdlle. de la Vergne, but who now lives more from her presence in the Letters than by the novels she wrote. There was the portrait of Christophe de la Tour de Coulanges, Madame de Sévigné's uncle, who as Abbé de Livry, was surnamed *le bien bon*, and who, in 1671, built the chapel attached to Les Rochers. There was Jacques Troussier, Marquis de Pommenar, the famous Breton nobleman who was accused of false coining, was found Not Guilty, and actually paid the expenses of his arrest in bad

money. Not one of the least interesting portraits was that of the Marquise de Lambert, the well-known Mademoiselle de Larlan, and widow of the Marquis de Locmaria: that lieutenant-general who danced the famous *passe-pieds* to such perfection that Madame de Sévigné, enchanted, handed him down to posterity in her Letters.

Her bedroom and study remain almost as she herself left them. The inkstand she preferred, the pen she held, the very powder and patch boxes she used, small trifles she prized, are there. Time, as well as the bright and clever being to whom they belonged, has thrown a glamour over them; that certain sense of veneration with which we look upon everything over which the ages have rolled. It is long since Madame de Sévigné herself has passed away, yet her presence seemed very real as we looked upon her possessions, the things she had handled. The rooms seemed haunted by her voice that was so musical, and her laughter that was ever spontaneous. She might have passed only yesterday into the silent land. What she had gazed upon then, we gazed upon now; the walks she delighted in, the very trees which had so often shaded her from the midday sun, listened to her animated conversation when surrounded by a bevy of chosen spirits in whom she delighted, and whom she fascinated by that strongest of all attractions, the charm of intellect and sympathy: though it is well-known that hers was a sympathy not always manifest, and held well in hand. For it is well that our best emotions should be under the control of our reason. The gardens and grounds, the labyrinths, the park, the great courtyard, the woods with their temples and summer-houses, their endless avenues, were gigantic: and through all and upon all, the spirit of Madame de Sévigné seemed to hover.

As we passed into each stately apartment it was shrouded in gloom, but our guide going before us opened the windows and threw wide the great green *persiennes*, admitting floods of sunshine and dispelling all the ghostly shadows. The whole time she was nervously listening for the possible return of the *gardienne*, although she acknowledged she had never known her arrive a minute before her hour. "But it is when people are not wanted that they are sure to turn up," she remarked, philosophically; "no matter how trifling and innocent your reason may be for wishing their absence. She is furious if I attempt to show the Château, and it is unjust and selfish. People do not want the trouble of coming for nothing—and no one could resist monsieur's pleading," with a very timid glance at H. C.

We departed, wishing that we could spend days, nay weeks, in these lovely and illustrious haunts. If the gardens were stiff and the paths straight, and the flower-beds somewhat too set and ceremonious, still there was absolute calm and repose about the place; an infinite wealth of verdure; a few minutes would take you into bewildering labyrinths, beyond which were the woods, wild and



beautiful, where the birds sang and the graceful squirrels chased each other and played at hide and seek round the trees, and the wind and the branches made their wonderful music.

We said good-bye to it all, rewarding our guide according to her merits, and turned our faces towards Vitré In a very short time we met a tall, determined-looking woman, carrying a large umbrella, trudging back with the stride of a dragoon. She looked at us very keenly and evidently suspected treason. But she passed on with a "long, lingering look," and we also continued our way.

"La gardienne du Château," said our driver, turning round with a delighted air of having circumvented her for once. "That poor little Louise has just saved herself. If the gentlemen had remained another ten minutes, she would have had the wrath of the gardienne upon her. She knows how to raise a tempest, that Madame de Coinmenteur. For all that, she is a good woman *au fond*."

We passed out of the influence of the Château and the forests and the trees; passed through the long avenue which brought us to the very confines of the town, with its antiquated roofs and rising towers. The streets looked more gay and lively than we had yet seen them. It was Sunday, and their day of rest and leisure. Every one was abroad in his best—a poor best sometimes, but almost invariably as neat and clean as if they had just stepped out of a band-box. They were not all as comely as our friends Antoine and Rose-Marie, but comeliness is by no means a universal gift, and many a Rose-Marie has to live out her little life, feeling that in spite of her sponsor's good intentions her place is amongst the awkward hollyhocks and the remote paths where roses and lilies do not grow.

The place was crowded with loungers, not a few of them wearing the goat skins and the long hair that made them look so very much like wild men of the woods. Madame was in her bureau as we passed through into the salle à manger. Her déshabille was discarded, and she was resplendent in rustling silk and a cap with magnificent ribbons, the whole worthy of having come from a Parisian modiste's, and worn with an air that would have become a duchess.

"What did you think of Les Rochers?" she asked, as we paused a moment to salute this dazzling apparition. "Is it not charming? The Château is gorgeous, the gardens are perfection, the woods and the birds are a dream. We owe much to Madame de Sévigné. Not too many strangers visit Vitré, but half of those who do, come for the express purpose of seeing Les Rochers."

We passed on to the dining-room, where a small shock awaited H. C. At a remote side table, with her back cunningly placed towards the window, resplendent in beautiful golden hair, and, like our hostess, magnificent in a Parisian costume, sat Mademoiselle Virginie Pichon. Breakfasting with her was the gallant *Capitaine de Marine en retraite*, as devoted in his attentions as a favoured courtier to his queen. As soon as she caught sight of us, she coloured furiously,

and if it was possible not to be mistaken, her eyes shot darts of anger at H. C. Her very stiff silk gown seemed to rustle and bristle out, just as a turkey in his rage will shake out his feathers. But a very polite and deferential bow and a very sweet smile from H. C. cleared the overcharged atmosphere and averted the storm. Mdlle. Pichon realised that she was safe. There would be neither scandal nor revelation. Monsieur le Capitaine was, if possible, more devoted than ever; and, as Madame afterwards confided to us, that very morning after déjeuner he had offered his hand, heart, and illustrious name to Mdlle. Pichon. Before another moon had waxed and waned she would have become Madame de Carnavalle.

"But how is it possible for one woman to have two such distinct individualities?" asked H. C. "The magnificent lady of twenty-five at breakfast this morning was no more like the wonderful old creature that actually terrified me last night than a wintry landscape in the north is like the gardens of the Hesperides." H. C. is always flowery and poetical. After all, it has its advantages: those who live above the clouds have perpetual sunshine.

"Hush!" cried Madame, laughing and blushing. "Walls have ears. Those transformations are our little secrets: the privileges of the fair sex. We can appear young when we have almost forgotten our youth. The soft pink that monsieur sees on many a fair cheek is often nothing but a true artistic effort; and if he ever has the termerity to salute some of those chaste and charming cherry lips, he will carry away with him the bloom of roses as well as the perfume of violets."

This confidential communication took place when the shades of night had once more fallen, and Vitré was again steeped in the mystery and poetry of darkness. Again we wandered about the streets, revelling in all these wonderful effects and impressions, all this old-world atmosphere. Of its kind there is nothing equal to it, and Vitré stands out as a magnificent memorial to the departed ages. Its outlines once seen can never be forgotten; its influence once felt remains for ever. With magnetic force you will feel drawn to all this charm of architecture and antiquity. It is in itself a poem-without-words of the very highest order, leaving an impression upon the spirit and the imagination that is outside and infinitely beyond the mere power of language.

But Brittany itself is full of poetry, full of beauty. The influence of the religious fervour and earnest devotion of its people, unconsciously to themselves, has stamped itself upon their country, striking a keynote that gives out no uncertain sound. It is always so in the history of the world. Whether nationally or individually, the steadfast recognition of the Divine Power brings its reward: the opposite its consequences. And fortunately for mankind, singly and collectively, in spite of all his mistakes: THERE IS A DIVINITY THAT SHAPES OUR ENDS, ROUGH-HEW THEM HOW WE WILL.

## NO UNWELCOME GUEST.

Ah, sir, it's well you've come at last;
You've been away a sight too long!
But time seems short when once it's past.
(I hope you'll find the ale is strong!)
You fear the changes you may see,
But none's so great as there might be!

Aye, sir, we village people know
A little more than we are told.
Your lady-mother wished you well
When you believed her stern and cold
Don't grieve, sir: madam is all right,
Only her hair has turned quite white!

Young folks, sir, are so quick and hard
(That chicken's roasted to a turn),
But life has lessons for us all
That always cost us much to learn.
And madam will not grudge her pain,
When once she has her son again!

The old hall's standing where it did
(I reckon you are bound there straight).
You'll find that madam's chair is set
That she may always watch the gate:
And in her window, every night,
With her own hands she puts a light.

The Vicar's daughter (don't you start,
Dear sir, for she's Miss Mary still)
Is pale and thinner than she was,
For patient love is hard to kill!
She's been so good to madam too.
(Cook's sending up a pie for you!)

Don't smile, sir. 'T is in ways like these
That folk like us can show our joy—
That sweet Miss Mary has her love,
And our dear lady has her boy:
And cook and me expect, at least,
You'll let us dress your wedding feast.

Isabella Fyvie Mayo.

NO UNWELCOME GUEST.

# THE MYSTERY AT LYNDON CHASE.

## I.

THE dark December days of 18— were fast drawing to a close when, in response to a briefly-worded statement that he would take no refusal, from my cousin, Sir John, or, as he was usually styled among his friends, Jack Lyndon, I came down from town to join the Christmas party at Lyndon Chase.

Some five years of the changes and chances which beset the career of a private secretary had passed since my last Christmas at Lyndon; and some changes had visited the old place too. My uncle, Sir Philip Lyndon, was dead, and his eldest son, Ralph, was taking his last long sleep in the sombre depths of an African forest.

A wild, hot-tempered, spendthrift fellow had been this Ralph Lyndon, given to gambling a little and fast living generally, and I had always believed his father had no very great affection for him. However that might have been, on the very day that he came of age, the lad went upstairs after a stormy scene in the library, packed his portmanteau and ordered the dog-cart round, vowing he would never set foot in the house again while his father lived: and the vow was kept faithfully enough.

Yet, perhaps, if Sir Philip's anger had been less bitterly contemptuous, some kind of reconciliation might have followed. There was always much to work upon in the very strong and tender attachment between Ralph and his brother. Jack was a mere boy of thirteen at the time of the bitter quarrel of his father and elder brother, but he was old enough to feel the consequent separation keenly, and for a long time refused to be comforted. But, as the years of Ralph's self-imposed exile wore on, he grew more reconciled; perhaps forgot a little; while he was studiously taught to regard his brother as the prodigal son, and one, moreover, for whom there was no place of repentance.

Some years later news had come of Ralph's death, and now, at the time of my story, his younger brother reigned in his stead and was keeping up one of the traditions of the House of Lyndon in the Christmas party of uncles, aunts and cousins of every degree. He was a handsome, sunny-tempered, open hearted fellow, my cousin Jack, always ready to lend you his horses, dogs and guns, or to put his name to a bill, or square an account with pleasant alacrity.

I found the house at Lyndon full to overflowing—a merry party over which Lady Lyndon, Jack's stepmother, presided with somewhat stern and unbending sway. I received the heartiest of welcomes from Jack, and was speedily taken into his confidence on every conceivable subject, from the erection of new cottages in the park down to the docking of his terrier's tail.

"To tell the truth, old fellow, I'm uncommonly glad to get a holiday just now," he said to me as we lounged together over my dressing-room fire. "My agent, Henderson, is a capital fellow: manages the estate, and me, too, admirably; but somehow he makes me work confoundedly hard, won't allow me either time or money for any dissipation; he's been with me five years now. I don't mind telling you that affairs were in rather a mess when I came into the estate, what with poor Ralph's gambling debts and my father's experimental high farming. Henderson has nearly succeeded in putting them straight; made me cut down all my expenses; give up the training stables and betting book. Why, I have to consult him first if I only want to buy a new hunter; 'pon my honour I have."

There was always a touch of the spendthrift about all the Lyndons, and I was privately a little rejoiced to hear of Jack's having so severe a check upon his youthful extravagances.

With hunting, shooting, carpet dances and tableaux vivants, the short winter days passed quickly and pleasantly enough, and on Christmas Eve another guest appeared, whom Lyndon introduced as his agent, Captain Henderson. Finding he was alone and spending a solitary Christmas in a half-finished house, Jack had, with his usual good nature, invited him to join the party at the Chase.

He was a tall, rather handsome fellow of five-and-thirty, or thereabouts, with a dark, curiously impassive face, a hard, firmly set mouth underneath the heavy moustaches, and keen, dark eyes, somewhat impenetrable in the steady directness of their gaze, a quiet, courteous manner and guarded speech. He had lived abroad some years before coming to the Chase, Henderson told us; but the subject of his travels was one on which he spoke with what seemed rather a lack of interest than a studied avoidance of the matter.

A good shot and cross country rider, always ready to teach a youngster how to hold a gun, or pilot a timid maiden in the hunting field, he speedily became a favourite amongst us; and Lyndon pressed him to prolong his visit till the New Year. After a little hesitation he consented.

## II.

THERE was no party at the Chase on New Year's Eve, Lady Lyndon having some kind of prejudice against the frivolity of dancing the New Year in and Old Year out; and the next evening was fixed for the ball.

We had spent most of the day in the saddle, and the smoking-room was soon deserted, as after midnight mutual congratulations and good wishes spoken, one by one the fellows lounged away to bed; and only Henderson, myself, and young Dick Cheyne, of Redlands, a younger son of a younger branch of the most illustrious house of Lyndon, were left to finish our cigars over the dying fire, Jack

having gone out for a final consultation with my lady over the difficult question of precedence.

It was a still, moonless night, a heavy, impenetrable blackness against which the blacker shadows of the trees stood out faintly here and there: a slight fog rose from the damp earth, but the air was so warm and close we had set the window wide open and sat before it, Henderson lying back in a low chair, I opposite to him. Cheyne stood on the left, leaning his broad shoulders against the window-frame, his head thrown back a little as he watched the puffs of smoke from his cigar.

The one window of the smoking-room opened on to the terrace, which ran the whole length of the side of the house; a broad gravel path, with a low stone balustrade, dividing it from the slope of turf below; at the extreme end of the terrace, and angle of the house, a high, ivy-covered wall shut out the kitchen gardens and stables from view.

We had not spoken for some few minutes, and it seemed to me, as I sat watching the dull red glow of the fire on the panelled walls, that the silence without and within was growing a little oppressive, and I was conscious somehow of a desire to shut out the black stillness and heavy air of the night. I turned to speak to Dick.

"I wish you would shut the window, Cheyne."

He drew his cigar from between his lips quickly, and with a warning gesture.

"Listen," he said, half under his breath.

There was a sound of footsteps on the gravel outside—footsteps, certainly, but such as I never heard before. The long, dragging, heavy tread of four feet it seemed to me, slow and stealthy, but so distinct I could hear the rattle of loose gravel at each regular and measured tread.

They came nearer, and Cheyne drew himself up and turned his head towards the square of white light which shone through the open, unsheltered window into the darkness without.

Henderson lifted his half closed eyes. "What is it?" he asked indifferently.

"I don't know; a dog, I think," answered Cheyne, still keeping an earnest gaze on the ground before him.

I got up, and stood looking over his shoulder.

The sound was close behind us now, and the something slunk past our feet as we stood there, and disappeared.

"Some brute of a dog prowling about—but where the deuce has he gone?" exclaimed Cheyne, still in an undertone.

He strode out quickly on to the terrrace.

The window at which we were standing was not more than two feet from the high wall at the end of the terrace, and the angle formed by it and the wall of the house was—with the exception of a few inches of black shadow—filled with light from our lamps. The very

ivy leaves and grey-green twigs of wisteria on the walls shone out clear and distinct, but there was nothing there; and Cheyne kicked out among the roots of ivy and creepers, and leaned over the balustrade, peering into the darkness below, before he came back to me.

"I can't make out where it went," he said, half impatiently. "There's no hole in the wall among that ivy, is there?"

"No, I think not. Listen again."

He turned round sharply, and took a stride back into the middle of the walk, standing full in the light from the window.

The mysterious footsteps were coming back again, slower and more stealthy they sounded, but no less distinct than before. Henderson had risen and stood beside me, his head bent forward a little to listen, his cigar held out carefully behind him.

They came creeping on, those horribly slow, dragging steps, and then the shadow glided past our feet again, and Cheyne wheeled round with a quick exclamation. There was nothing behind him, and every leaf and twig on the terrace wall hung motionless in the damp, still air; nothing in the light, and the darkness was impenetrable.

"I can't make out where the thing disappeared to," he repeated a little excitedly, but speaking in the same low tone; "I'm certain I saw something, didn't you?"

"I thought so, but never mind it now; come in and shut the window, there's a good fellow; it's getting cold."

He followed me in, glancing back over his shoulder, and Henderson sat down again, turning a little from the light.

"It's a most extraordinary thing," pursued Cheyne; "I'll swear something went by, but where, in the name of all that's puzzling, could it have gone? It couldn't have been a ghost, though I suppose this house is haunted, as all respectable old mansions ought to be. I'll ask Lyndon when he comes in if this is the ghost's walk."

Henderson lifted his eyes from the floor and glanced at the lad half absently, it seemed, from beneath the half-closed lids. I started a little and followed his glance uneasily; Cheyne's careless words had more in them than he knew of.

"Better not; I wouldn't say anything at all about it, if I were you," I answered quickly.

"Why not?" Cheyne stared at me.

"Because, my dear fellow, this *is* the ghost's walk, and there *is* a tradition respecting it, which, I suppose, you don't happen to know."

"No; what is it?"

"Simply this: whenever footsteps are heard and a shadowy something is seen on the terrace out there, the Master of Lyndon is doomed to die within the year."

Cheyne laughed scornfully. "What nonsense. You don't mean to say you believe in such rubbish, Lyndon?"

"I don't say anything of the kind, but I know that Jack believes

in it most firmly. He believes he heard it before his father's death, and that no Lyndon since the foundation of the world has ever passed away without this warning of death."

Cheyne shrugged his broad shoulders doubtfully. "I shouldn't have thought him so superstitious," he said. At that moment Jack himself came in.

"Charlie, my boy, Lady Lyndon and I have earned your undying gratitude," he began, with the gay, careless laugh that had so infectious a ring about it. "You are the victim of a conspiracy for the suppression of bachelors, active operations intrusted to very fair hands; time and place, the ball-room to-morrow night; so prepare to meet your fate like a man, old fellow. But look here; I received strict orders from Lady Lyndon to break up this conclave, so I propose that we retire. Henderson, I'm afraid that pulling brute of mine was too much for you to-day; you look tired."

Jack had gone up to him, and was speaking in the low and exceedingly winning tone he sometimes used. Henderson answered, with his usual grave courtesy, that he was a little tired and would go to bed.

What was the meaning of the look in those keen eyes, as they rested for a moment on the other's handsome, sunny face? It haunted me that night with the persistency of a vague dim memory, unfolding itself in some dusty, forgotten corner of the brain.

Twenty-four hours later, and the great hall at Lyndon was a blaze of lights, flowers and fine dresses, and I was manfully submitting to my fate in the person of a gay little heiress of twenty summers. Jack performed his duties as host with untiring energy and vigour; and I watched him once, as he stood near me in a pause of the dance, bending down from his stately height to a slender little figure at his side, his dark eyes glowing a little, his clear, resonant voice so gay; such strong young life flushed into his handsome face and beat in his steady pulses—it seemed strange, impossible, that he should be doomed.

I pulled myself up quickly. It was absurd, worse than absurd, to let the vaguely troubled undercurrents of thought, that had haunted me since morning, gain the upper hand like this.

I tried hard to dismiss such thoughts, and yet, somehow, I found myself in the smoking-room again an hour after midnight, standing at the open window, and listening for the mysterious footsteps on the terrace.

The lamp on the table was turned down, and I did not at first see that I was not alone, until Henderson, half rising from the depths of his easy chair beside the window, spoke to me.

"Have you come here to escape the heat and glare in the Hall, Mr. Lyndon? 'Pon my honour, I found it a little too much. I regret to have to confess it, but I believe I am getting too old for this sort of thing."

It was another starless, moonless night, only the white ghostly light of a little sprinkling of snow, which lay here and there in tiny drifts, under the trees and on the gravel paths, gleamed with a faint, pallid whiteness under the leaden sky; a restless breeze stirred among the nestling ivy leaves and leafless branches of the creepers on the wall, and came in at the open window.

Sweeping into the silence came the sound of voices, laughter and music from the ball-room, a murmur, which rose and fell again with the sighing of the wind, but failed to drown that other sound I was waiting to hear—the soft, stealthy steps on the gravel walk.

I had not stood there many minutes before they came, dragging slowly past the closed windows of the library and drawing-room, coming nearer and nearer—the sound a little deadened, it seemed, by the snow—until they passed my very feet, and I swung out on to the terrace with a sudden energy that must infallibly have brought me into sharp collision with anything that had been there.

Nothing but darkness and silence; and, baffled again, I returned to the window. Henderson's chair was empty, and I caught the sound of the door closing after him as I came in, and took up my station once more to listen, the vaguely uncomfortable sensations of anxiety and foreboding against which I had been struggling all day, returning on me with fuller force.

It was not new to me, this tradition of the Ghost's Walk, in which my uncle, Sir Philip, and his father before him, had believed so firmly, and in which Jack put as unquestioning a faith; but I had never speculated on the subject before, and now I found my scepticism less assured than was altogether pleasing to a practical, commonsense young fellow of seven-and-twenty.

I stood still listening and meditating, uneasy on these points, when the door opened again, and Jack's clear voice came ringing across the dark space between us.

"Charlie, is that you? Now, 'pon my word, this is too bad; you have left the prettiest girl in the room to sit out the 'My Queen Waltz,' waiting for her truant cavalier. You are being inquired for on all sides, and here I find you sitting in the smoking-room. It really is too bad."

He had come over to me and laid his hand on my shoulder lightly, adding a quick: "What is the matter? You are not ill, my boy?"

"Ill? no; I only came for a breath of fresh air." I recovered myself with something of an effort. "The rooms were so confoundedly hot, but I'd no idea I had been here so long; better go back, I suppose, and down on my knees before my deserted partner."

"I rather think you had, but you don't deserve to be forgiven either—and smoking, too, you barbarian. Listen! what's that?"

Lyndon's hand rested more heavily on my shoulder for an instant and he came a step nearer. I would have answered him, have kept

him back if I could, but something held me silent and powerless, and slowly again, but more distinctly, more heavily fell the sound of those stealthy footsteps on the white, silent, snow-covered terrace, bringing with them now a sense of oppression and strange, unreasoning fear, against which I could not even struggle.

A moment later, an ugly shadow glided past our feet, and Jack leaned back against the window-frame with a half-suppressed groan.

"Charlie," he said under his breath; "I did not think you were listening for that."

"For what?" I answered sharply. "There is some dog about, that is all."

He took his hand from my shoulder, went in and sat down in Henderson's chair, turning his face away from the light.

"For pity's sake, Jack, don't get that absurd notion into your head; can't you hear a sound out there without fancying it is—is that? It's ridiculous, mere superstition," I exclaimed, seeing it was useless to feign ignorance of his meaning.

He interrupted me with an impatient gesture, but not raising his head.

"I heard it before, Charlie, when my father died. I cannot be mistaken now. It is the warning for another Lyndon, within the year, you know. Well, I suppose I had counted on as long a life as most men. I hope you'll have a longer reign than I, old fellow."

"Jack, Jack, if you want me to think you a sane man, don't talk like that; what we heard just now is to be easily accounted for if anyone took the trouble to go round to the kennels. Come back to the Hall, there's a good fellow, and don't talk about dying and my reign like a superstitious old woman."

I bent down to him a little as I spoke, and he turned to me, shaking his head, but with a faint smile.

"You will not ridicule or argue me out of my conviction, Charlie. Do you think it is possible once to have heard that and to have forgotten? I tell you it is the warning and I am doomed to die within the year. Rather advise me to set my house in order, old fellow."

Argument, ridicule, persuasion were of no avail, and I grew rather desperate at last, and hardly knew what I said in my earnest endeavour to dispel the unhappy fancy from his mind.

"Don't say any more, Charlie; let us go back to those people I have to entertain and try to forget it till that duty is done. And don't say a word of this to Henderson or any of the other fellows," he added in a lower tone, as he got up and put his arm through mine.

"Of course not," I answered, almost dragging him out of the room in my anxiety to get away.

Watching the lad closely, as I could not help doing while music, laughter, the sound of happy voices and rythmic fall of light feet on the polished floor went on hour after hour, I could almost have

fancied he had thrown off the gloomy foreboding which oppressed him so short a time ago, in the steady, determinate self-control which made him join in dance, jest and laughter with the same light-hearted gaiety of manner as before. Henderson was watching him, too, and some touch of gravity in the calm indifference of his keen, dark eyes gave me the impression that he knew as much of Lyndon's fatal superstition as I did.

III.

JACK came to my room about nine o'clock on the same morning booted and spurred, hunting stock in hand. "It's a shame to wake you up, Charlie, my boy," he said cheerily; "but I want you to ride over to Whatcote with me to see the new house I'm building for Henderson, and I'm going to start in half-an-hour."

"I was just thinking of turning out," I answered him sleepily.

"All right; Henderson is going to take the youngsters to the meet for me, and I've ordered our horses to meet us at Mace Hill Spinney at eleven; be quick, there's a good fellow, and come down to the gun-room; we'll have breakfast there, as we used to do when we were lads, eh?"

He departed and, after a rather hasty toilet, I followed, to find Henderson had already joined him at the breakfast table.

Later that same evening, Henderson came up to me, remarking, with a suggestion of anxiety in his tone and manner, on Lyndon's evident lack of his usual spirits and that strange fancy of his about the warning. The quiet, civil tones of his voice were, somehow, not a pleasant interruption to my reverie, and, moreover, I was a little annoyed at being questioned on a subject which was becoming very painful to me, and I answered him shortly. "Time will explain it, no doubt."

"It must be explained sooner or later," he said at last, finding I was not disposed to discuss the question and dismissing it with graceful, indifferent ease; but I left him with a certain sense of having been used as a source of information. I was beginning to regard this grave, self-contained man of the world with something very like distrust.

Time went on; the party at the Chase dispersed, we heard no more of the ghostly footsteps and I began to hope that Jack would speedily forget the whole affair; but I was mistaken; the conviction that he was doomed to die within the year remained with him, the severest reasoning, the lightest ridicule were alike useless, and, at last, I gave up speaking to him on the subject. He insisted on my staying with him for some months to come, and, as I had given up my post and become in some sense, a wanderer on the face of the earth, I yielded to his wish, and we went up to town, yachted in the Mediterranean for six weeks; then to Norway; and, in August, tramped the moors and bagged our grouse still together.

Thus the year slipped by, and it was October before Jack turned his face homewards and his thoughts towards the Lyndon covers. Towards the middle of the month, we found ourselves back at the Chase in sole possession; Lady Lyndon was at Eastbourne. Jack had not invited any guests, and he and I were alone until Henderson came again and joined us. Lyndon seemed to like to have him there, somehow.

It was some time after midnight and Jack still lingered in my room, lounging over the fire and talking a little fitfully, with the restlessness which was so unlike his old self.

"Sometimes I think I'm a fool, Charlie," he said to me suddenly after a silence. "To be brooding over this and thinking I'm going to die; and yet I can't shake off the impression. No Lyndon died without the warning, you know."

"According to that you ought to have heard it before poor Ralph was killed at Masuta; how was it there was no warning for him?" I asked, in the calm, judicial tones of a man whose logic is unassailable.

He looked up quickly, a touch of something like relief in his face. "I did not hear it then, but ——" There was a low knock at the door, "Come in," I shouted, and Henderson appeared; Jack turned half round in his chair to glance at him.

"Oh, it's you, Henderson; I thought it was my fellow—nothing wrong, is there?"

"No, nothing. May I come in, Mr. Lyndon? I have something to say to you and Sir John which I would rather say here than anywhere else."

I was a little surprised. Henderson's manner was grave almost to sternness, and he glanced at Lyndon as he spoke with the same keen, almost questioning look that had puzzled me before.

Closing the door behind him softly, he came in. He would not take the vacant chair I pulled forward, but placed himself before the fire, a little to Jack's right, leaning one arm on the high, narrow mantleshelf. Jack turned to him with the slightest touch of impatience in his tone.

"Are you come to lecture me again on my extravagance in cigars, Henderson, or to bully me into putting down the drag, and only keeping one hunter? because, if so, let us have it over quickly—I always get such a confounded thrashing when I have to fight anything out with you."

Henderson smiled a little, the hard lines in his worn face softening as he met Jack's eyes.

"I've no lecture for you to-night, Sir John," he said quietly; "only something to tell you, which I had hoped I might have kept from you till the end."

He stopped abruptly, lifting his head and looking over Jack's shoulder into the depth of shadow beyond, where the light of our solitary candle and the ruddy glow of the fire fell short.

Jack started, turning a little pale. A faint sound from the terrace below broke into the silence, growing clearer and more distinct, even through the closed windows and heavy shutters, as we listened. I got up in a sort of desperation, crossed the room, and flung them open sharply—anything to drown those slow, horrible footsteps dragging over the damp, cold gravel below. They ceased before the sound of swinging bars and rattling bolts had died away.

Neither of us spoke, and there was an instant of dead silence. Then Jack got up and began to pace the room restlessly, with quick, impatient strides.

Henderson sat down, leaning forward in his chair, and his face half hidden by one hand. In his presence, I could not but seem to ignore Jack's evident distress, and I lounged back to my seat and lighted a fresh cigar with an affectation of indifference. Jack came up and paused beside me at last, leaning both arms on the mantle-shelf, and putting his head down upon them. He seemed to have forgotten Henderson's presence, and the revelation he had come there to make, in the struggle between the strong, passionate love of life, and the hope and courage that would face death calmly, without a fear or murmur—a struggle in which no word, even from the closest of friends, might have a part.

I was silent. Glancing up a moment later I saw that Henderson had risen and was standing beside Jack, one hand laid on his shoulder. Perhaps the action a little surprised Lyndon ; he turned quickly and confronted him with a touch of resolute self-control, and a slight gesture of annoyance at the detaining hand, but Henderson still kept it there.

"Jack," he said gently, "don't you know me at last?—your brother Ralph?"

Lyndon started, staring at him in absolute amazement.

"What do you mean? My brother Ralph has been dead ten years or more," he answered sternly.

"It was not Ralph Lyndon who died and was buried in the forest at Masuta ; he escaped that fate—by the mercy of God—to come home to you, Jack, and is here now. Don't you remember me, old fellow? I thought you would have recognised me before, and more than once, at the first, I was afraid you had discovered my secret."

He had laid both hands on Jack's shoulders, and as they stood so, face to face, Jack's eyes were fixed on his with an eager, questioning gaze, which grew more and more searching, more intensely anxious, as Henderson went on speaking. The contrast between the cool, self-possessed man of the world, with all the secrets of his past life so carefully guarded beneath the grave and courteous manner, and the elder brother pleading for recognition with the younger, was so sharp and striking a one, I was more puzzled and bewildered than perhaps was Jack himself.

"If you are really my brother Ralph, why did you conceal the

fact from me at first—why not have claimed your right to the place I took as my father's only surviving son?" he questioned, still in the same low, stern tone.

"Because it seemed to me that I had no right to it. After so much of—of undutiful folly, I came back here to try and undo some of the mischief I had done, and I believed I could best accomplish that by working with you as I have done."

"Have you no proof to offer me?" There was still a shadow of doubt and wonder in Jack's keen, searching eyes.

"Yes, ample proof; but you don't doubt me, Jack? Ten years ago, though I must have changed since then—have you no recollection of me?—do you remember nothing of our life here before I left you?—of the many nights we have slept here in this room together?—of——" he paused a moment, as if the tide of half-forgotten memories were too strong for words——"of the summer evenings when we ran down to the river for a stolen half-hour's bream fishing, and I carried you back to bed half asleep, when the moon was down and the meadows were white with mist—you remember it, Charlie?"

He had fallen back into the old familiar names of Jack and Charlie, and now, as he glanced across at me, fixing his dark eyes on mine, the two faces so near together were strangely alike; and the painful bewilderment and effort to recall long-lost memories in Lyndon's grew more intense.

"The river," he muttered, half to himself, "the river." Taking Henderson's right arm, he drew the hand from his shoulder, pushed back the coat and shirt sleeves, and turned the wrist to the light slowly.

Henderson smiled a little. "Ah," he said quietly, "I had forgotten that."

There, just below where the blue veins met, was a long, L-shaped scar, crossing the wrist from left to right, some three or four inches—a mark which perhaps not one fellow in a thousand would have borne, but in itself so slight and insignificant a one that perhaps only a brother would have known of or recognised it. But both Jack and I had cause to remember that scar: to remember the dark water closing over our heads as we struggled together beside our overturned boat above the weir in Lyndon River—to remember, though we were but children at the time, Ralph's ringing shout as he came leaping down the hill, tearing off his clothes and springing in after us; the terror with which we had clung to him; the desperate struggle with the swift, silent current; the cheering as they dragged him out, clutching Jack's coat so tightly they had to cut a piece of it from out of his rigid fingers; his blood-stained arm, where a jagged nail in the weir-head had caught it; to remember, too, our terrible distress when they said he would die; his father's fervent "God bless you, Ralph, my boy," when at last the strong young life in him

triumphed, and he awoke from his long swoon to consciousness once more.

The truth flashed across us both with a suddenness of conviction that admitted of no doubt, no hesitation; a little flush rose to Lyndon's handsome face.

"Ralph, Ralph!" he cried, a ring of sharpest pain and self-reproach in his tone: "what have I done that I did not know you, and have stood in your place all these years?"

His hands were grasping his brother's now, and Henderson drew a step nearer.

"I had forfeited my right to that, lad; I did not want it, either. I came home to see you, not to take your place here—I was never fit to do that—and to atone in some measure, if I could, for the folly and wickedness of past years. You know how I found things and how hard we have worked together to put them straight, and now it seems my work is done. I would not have told you now, though, but for this. I could keep silence no longer when I knew you thought your time had come."

Lyndon scarcely understood the allusion it seemed.

"It was like you, Ralph, to do it; but I would give the world to have known you at first. It is a bitter thing to me to find that I have had you with me all these years and known you only as Ralph Henderson," he said passionately.

"It was not your fault, my dear boy; you need not regret it for a moment. I have done the work I set myself to do; and now it is finished there is nothing hard but the leaving you."

He stopped a little abruptly, glancing at me again. I had been sitting still, staring rather stupidly at them. Ralph smiled as his eyes met mine, and, releasing his hands from Jack's firm grasp, he came across to me holding them out.

"Charlie sits here staring like an owl," he said, laughing. "Shake hands with me, old fellow, won't you—if you know me, at least."

Face, voice and the low, pleasant laugh were all alike strangely familiar now, and I jumped up, took the offered hands and squeezed them heartily, with some rather incoherent words of wonder and welcome.

And then once more the slow, faint sound from the terrace below fell on our ears and Ralph looked at his brother again; Jack started and turned very white as their eyes met.

"Curse this place," he muttered excitedly, half under his breath; "are we to be for ever haunted by that hateful sound?"

"It is for me, Jack, my boy, not for you," Ralph answered cheerfully. "I have known it ever since Charlie and I heard it before, when the new year was hardly begun."

"What do you mean?" questioned Jack, facing round on him with a sudden effort at carelessness.

"It is the 'warning' for another Lyndon, you know, and it is not

the only warning I have had. Six months of intermittent fever and semi-starvation on the Gold Coast play the mischief with a fellow's constitution, and—well, I have found myself failing a little for two or three years past, and now Paget tells me there is nothing more to be done for me; my time has come; within the year, you know; within the year."

"Nothing more to be done for you now? Paget is mistaken," broke in Jack, fighting hard I could see, against a fear which was no longer for himself. "He shall come here and say so to me."

Ralph's hand went back to his shoulder with a gentle and very caressing gesture.

"It is nonsense," exclaimed Jack half fiercely. "You are all right if you would not work so confoundedly hard."

Ralph shook his head. "I tried to persuade myself so at first, but it is of no use now. I am dying, old fellow."

"And you have let me stand here in your place all these years—blind fool that I have been; sacrificed yourself for me; slaved and worked yourself to death for me; and now, when you say it is too late for me to make amends to you, you tell me the whole truth. I can't bear this, Ralph, you have been cruelly hard on me, and yourself, too," muttered Jack hoarsely, turning away his head.

"It has been no sacrifice, lad, to see you here taking your father's place instead of me; there is nothing to regret but the parting, and we must both of us face that. My case is hopeless, you know."

"I don't believe it," cried Jack again. "I say Paget is mistaken; you shall see someone else."

"I will see all the doctors in Christendom, old fellow, if it will be any comfort to you; but don't let us talk of this again to-night. I shall have a few more days with you yet, and time enough to take my leave of you when the summons comes."

Jack turned away from him hurriedly and began to pace the room again in his old, restless, impatient way. Ralph was looking a little white and exhausted, though his manner was as calm and cheerful, and his voice as steady as ever; he sat down on the sofa and leaned back amongst the cushions wearily. We were all silent awhile, there seemed, somehow, little to be said after so strange a revelation and in the face of so bitter a parting. Jack still paced the room with hurried strides, the keenest pain and self-reproach in his downcast eyes and firmly closed mouth.

Presently Ralph spoke to him.

"I wish you would come and sit by me, Jack."

He came quickly and, meeting the grave, affectionate smile of the languid, dark eyes raised to his, he broke down altogether and hid his face in both hands, with a half-stifled sob. I got up and went out, leaving them alone together.

IV.

THERE is little more to tell. At Ralph's earnest request, a request Lyndon strenuously opposed at first, his secret was still kept, and only a few of his most intimate friends were told the real facts of the case. He would not, he said, have the few days left to him disturbed by the coming and going of the curious, and the empty questioning and comment of Lyndon gossips, and to the world at large he was Captain Henderson and Jack was still Sir John.

There was no question of Ralph's leaving Lyndon again. As the days and weeks went on, he failed a little, and Jack nursed him day and night, with devoted care and tenderness, refusing, with curious inconsistency, to believe, or admit to himself that he believed, the truth he found so bitter. Doctors came and went, till the house seemed haunted by keen, professional eyes, quiet footsteps and carefully modulated voices.

There was a surprising unanimity of opinion amongst them—Captain Henderson's lease of life was a very short one, and Jack's wrath and indignation with Paget and the whole race of doctors grew fiercer as hope died away and the dark shadow of death drew nearer and would not be denied. At last Ralph begged to be left in peace; he had spent most of the passing year in preparation, and, after a few visits from the lawyer, there was little to be done in the way of business. Looking back now on those dark autumn days, when we could do nothing but await the end in silent sorrow, I have fancied we half forgot, in our strong, passionate grief at losing him, the nobleness of Ralph's years of self-sacrifice; the place he had not filled, and could never fill, seemed somehow, of little importance. The noble name and broad lands of Lyndon he had given up for Jack's sake sank into comparative insignificance before the silent coming of the great and uninvited guest, who drew daily nearer and nearer: and at last entered.

Most of these last days we spent sitting beside Ralph's sofa as he lay in the pale November sunshine, or bright glow of the firelight in the library. He told us at intervals much of the story of his past life; of his vain fight with fortune, his falls into dark temptation, his struggles after better things, and final resolve to come home and undo, as far as he could, the wrong he had done there, the consequences of his folly, extravagance and evil example, against which Jack was not even trying to fight.

"I have always thanked God I had you, Jack," he said once; "the thought of you and the old place here came to me in my most reckless moments."

The year was fast drawing to a close again. Jack and I had been out for an hour or two one afternoon, a concession made to Ralph's often repeated wish that we would not sit moping in the house with him all day. Coming in again out of the dull December fog to the

warm, brightly-lighted room where he lay, I could not help thinking there was some change in the worn, handsome face, some failing in the clear, resonant voice that greeted our return.

"You have not been long, Jack, my boy; I'm glad to have you back, though. I want you to stay with me a little; you and Charlie, too."

"You don't feel worse, do you? I wish we had not left you," Jack answered anxiously, as he sat down beside the sofa, taking one of his brother's hands in his own. Ralph drew it away and put it beneath the coverlet, with a half smile.

"I'm glad you went out," he said cheerfully. "I have had the Vicar in. He stayed with me an hour or more, and we have been talking about the night-school and reading-room for the young fellows in the village; some of those big lads over at Whatcote, you know, Jack. We drew up a scheme together, and he went off at last to talk the matter over with Sanderson and open a subscription list and so on, and quite forgot, I believe, to read to or pray for me. Charlie, I shall have to ask you to do it."

He turned to me with a faint smile, I tried to meet the dark eyes steadily, and then catching Jack's significant glance, moved to the bell.

"No; now don't ring the bell and send for the doctor; he has warned me it would come like this, and he can do nothing for me. Don't send for him, there's a good fellow, Jack," he pleaded faintly. But I had already rung and Jack had gone to the door with a hasty order. He came back in a moment and knelt down beside his brother, raising his head a little on one arm.

"Thank you; that is a relief. Now, Charlie—will you?" he murmured.

I could not refuse him, though I could hardly see for a mist of tears, or speak for a choking in my throat; and no words would come to me but those few most sacred ones which he and Jack had learnt and said together as children, and perhaps sometimes forgotten in careless manhood.

"Thank you; never mind the rest," he murmured. Again the voice seemed failing fast now, and Jack bent over him in passionate grief and anxiety. A bright glow of firelight deepened the shadows of the faltering dusk, and a solemn silence had fallen over all the house, broken only by the faint, irregular breathing, and the slow drip of the misty rain on the terrace outside.

Once or twice Ralph spoke again, giving even these last few moments of his life to the brother for whom he had sacrificed so much.

"I shall leave him your charge, Charlie," turning his eyes to me with the old smile. "You were always a steady-going fellow, you know, and you must come down on him sharply if—if he gets into —mischief or is extravagant, buying young hunters—you know, or——"

Jack choked down a sob or two, and a little shadow of distress crossed the calm face.

"Don't, my dear boy; don't grieve; you will have Charlie. And there was something else about that farm of Sanderson's—I hardly remember now. You must let Charlie help you—I am ready, and this is very easy and painless—my dear Jack——"

The dark eyes turned once more slowly and languidly on Jack's face, and resting there a moment, brightened with a smile of absolute satisfaction and content.

And then the hand Jack held in so firm a grasp relaxed a little, and before the echo of the doctor's soft voice and step in the hall reached our ears, I saw that he was no longer with the brother who had loved him tenderly and truly enough to give up for him his birthright, and serve him faithfully all these past years.

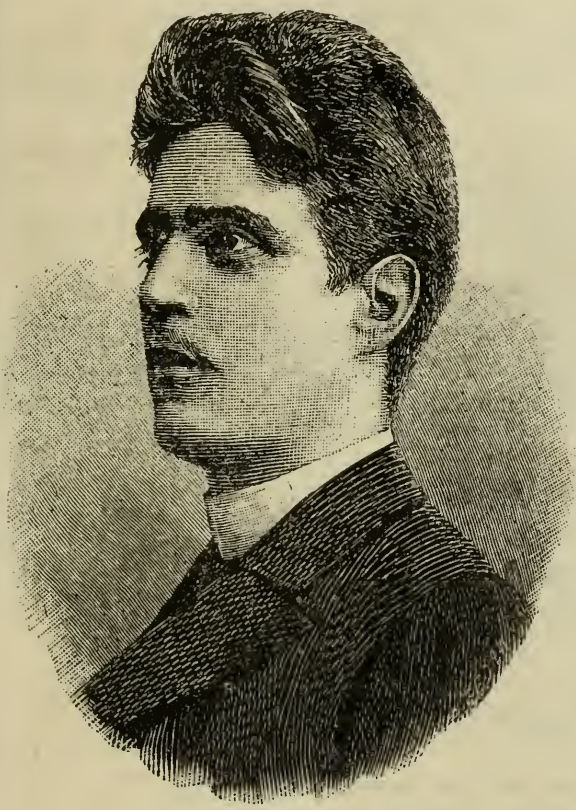
## A TRIO.

Grey large eyes that can laugh and smile,
Blue eyes, black eyes, lovingly bent,
Hearts still empty of worldly guile,
Souls still full of divine content!
Maudie, Fairy, Gipsy mine,
Blithest hearts in the world to me—
Enough for you that the sun will shine,
Whatever the ways of the world may be.

Enough for you that the birds will sing,
And the woods and the fields and the streams be glad,
Though cold days come with the fickle spring,
And the hearts of the weary be sad.
Go, gather your daisies, pink and white,
Bind them up in a daisy-chain;
Your only world is a world of delight,
And never a world of pain.

George Cotterell.

# THE COMPOSER OF "CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA."



PIETRO MASCAGNI.

THE chief topic of conversation in musical circles throughout Germany and Italy is that of the Operetta "Cavalleria Rusticana," which has taken the world by storm, and lifted a poor and unknown man, at one step, into wealth and fame.

As it has found its way to London, and is being performed at the Shaftesbury Theatre, a few words about the fortunate composer may be of interest.

Pietro Mascagni was born in Leghorn in 1863. His father was a baker, well respected, but too poor to give him a musical education, which was what the boy desired. He was a wild child, and not easily managed.

A rich, musical gentleman became interested in him, and sent him first to school, and then to the conservatorium at Milan. Here he worked by fits and starts, never putting his whole heart into it until a few weeks previous to each examination, when he would devote himself so entirely to study as invariably to come out with flying colours.

After sixteen years of age he roamed about Italy on foot, doing but little for himself, though he could play six different instruments.

At length he found himself in a little town of Calabria, called Cerignole. Here he obtained a very modest appointment as musical director of the town orchestra, and made the whole place musical by his genius.

It was in this far-away spot that he happened one day to take up an old newspaper, containing a notice that Signor Sonsogno, a music-seller of Naples, was willing to give some thousand francs for the best one-act operetta sent to him by a certain date. Notwithstanding that six weeks only remained of this time, he decided to enter the list of competitors; the obstacle, that he had no libretto, was overcome by

two of his friends, who at once set to work to adapt a novel by Wega, called "Cavalleria Rusticana," a Sicilian story.

Within the time his operetta was completed and sent in, and he, of the seventy-three competitors, won the first prize.

Verdi, who was one of the judges, said that this young man, Pietro Mascagni, would in the future occupy his own place.

The operetta was performed, for the first time, in the theatre Costanzi, at Rome, just a year ago, and received with the greatest enthusiasm.

Signor Sonsogno paid him 150,000 francs (£6,000) for permission merely to sell it to the various theatres.

His name is in everyone's mouth, and his operetta received with open arms in Spain, Hungary, Prague, Vienna, Hamburg, Berlin, Dresden and Leipzig.

We may conclude this brief sketch by recording one more triumph in his favour. His new opera, "L'Amico Fritz," has recently been brought out at Rome, and received with the utmost favour and enthusiasm.

## THE IDEAL.

Can none reach up to the grand model there
In the pure regions of the lofty mind,
Where all is noble, innocent and fair?—
Can none fulfil that which we hope to find
In answer to our vision? May we dare
Look for a faultless king? Ah, truth unkind
To show e'en flecks in Arthur—prove us blind
To hold as flawless diamond the most rare!
Poor child of earth, weeping to know how vain
Thy ardent quest, raise up thy eyes and see
The dawning of a hope that shall not wane.
That full perfection, here which cannot be
As shadowed forth in that bright dream of thine,
Has heav'n's wide realm for its eternal shrine.

# OUR GREAT GRANDMOTHER'S WEDDING DRESS.

## A Christmas Story.

By Ada M. Trotter.

"I DON'T see what is to be done, indeed I don't," said Bessie, surveying the wrecks of our united wardrobes. "Everything has been turned and re-turned, and is too shabby for further manipulation. We must tell Hugh it must be given up."

Lady Betty looked relieved, but the rest of us, who were of a mundane turn of mind, saw what she did not: that to give up this point was to put off the day of better things indefinitely.

We were four sisters dependent for daily bread on Hugh, our best of brothers. Bessie was our eldest, and Lady Betty came next to me. I am the ugly duckling of the family, all eyes and ears, and I love my Betty as though I were her dog. We always call her Lady Betty, because she is so dainty in her ways. She can't think of common things; her thoughts fly away to all kinds of lovely dreams; while if the rest of us are like me, they think often of what is for dinner, and whether, in fact, there will be enough for more than one dinner on the joint; and they would like new clothes and everything of the best. Lady Betty does not seem to know, or care.

Hugh is choir-master and organist of the Cathedral, and he wants to get pupils, but he is very shy; perhaps he is proud. People don't care to patronize him: and inferior teachers make a good living while he stands haughtily aloof. And now when this great chance is come to him, just for want of a suitable dress it must be set aside. For, one of the reasons that our Betty is so different from me is because she has the genius of song, and Hugh has trained her to sing exquisitely.

The Squire of the parish is a very strange man. I wish you specially to note this. He lives in a big, gloomy mansion, all alone with his family ghosts and their portraits. But it is said that he means to turn over a new leaf, and has sent for Major St. John, a far-away nephew and intends to make him his heir, and is going to give a series of entertainments to the county families of the neighbourhood. He has sent a request to Hugh to get up a good concert for Christmas Eve, and of course if Lady Betty sings it is bound to be a success; and perhaps Hugh would get more work; and then some of us could think of other things besides the grinding dull lives of making much out of nothing; but—we could never be like Betty.

It was hard to tell Hugh, but Bessie managed it very well. He was more disappointed than we expected, and looked keenly at

Betty, who was standing in the sunlight, trilling to the canary, warbling just like a bird.

"Girls," he said, "let her go in that cotton gown. No one will care what she has on when once she begins to sing."

Just then I had an idea, and I'm afraid I trod on Hugh's toes in my hurry. There was just one beautiful gown in our possession, though, perhaps, it was at least a hundred and fifty years old, if it was a minute.

"Bessie," I shrieked, "the great grandmother's wedding dress!"

It was an inspiration. No one replied. Hugh looked as if he thought we were all mad, but our kindly Bess said, in her genial way, "It's all right, Hugh; Lady Betty shall go."

He went away rather bewildered, and began to make out his concert programme, and we three left our clever ones together and ran up to the garret.

The gown was the only piece of property in our possession. It had been my mother's, but how it came to her we did not know, for our parents would not tell us anything of her ancestry. All we knew was that our father had been a public singer, that he had a fine tenor voice, which failed him when he was still young, and that he died heartbroken. All we knew of our mother was that she looked just like our Betty, and had faded out of life when my father's love no longer shielded her from pain. We valued the old gown for her sake, and because it seemed to tell us that our forbears had been gentlefolk, who, perhaps, had known freedom from small economies and cares.

We sat on the floor of the garret with the dress and its accompaniments of soft lace spread out amongst us. Bessie pronounced judgment on each part, as she looked at it between the slanting lights.

"The shoes are too big, but they are very pretty—red and gold. Dot, here, can stuff the toes with tissue paper. This blue, quilted skirt needs darning. I will see to that. The ruby and gold overdress, however, is perfect. Oh, dear, the lace is all to pieces, but we must mend it up as best we can. Well, that's settled. Come along, girls, and let us set to work. There is no time to lose."

When we got downstairs we found that for once our Betty had taken an obstinate turn. Go to the Park without her dear old Dot (myself) she would not. She could not sing if I were not there. That is how it was that I thought of writing the story. I was in it from first to last, and I followed at Betty's heels like a faithful shadow.

The grand evening arrived, and we all took a share in dressing our little lady; we were very anxious about the effect of the old gown, but we need not have been, for surely nothing could have looked so pretty as this sheeny ruby and gold.

"Now, Dot, on with your dress," cried Bessie, turning to me, her eyes shining with triumph, as Lady Betty stood with her music in her

hand waiting for me. I wore Bessie's best black silk, specially done up for the occasion. It was worn and shabby, but no matter—it fitted very well, and no one would look at me. Hugh had asked for a special sitting-room for us. He was proud, as I said before, and he did not wish us to mix with the rest of the performers; nor with the guests, as we could not be on an equality with them. It was foolish pride, no doubt. I am afraid I did not like his carefulness. I wanted to see something of the world now I was launched upon it, so after we had arrived and settled down I looked impatiently round the room.

Lady Betty was absorbed in the flowers. There were some fine pots of heather on the jardinière: she did not notice me when I slipped the bolt of the glass door aside and wandered into a conservatory.

I heard voices at a distance, and, keeping well behind the huge palms, I advanced until I was within a few yards of the speakers. To my surprise I saw Hugh, and barring his way was an old gentleman so strikingly like him, that he might have been his double.

"Pray who are you, sir?" thundered the old man. Hugh introduced himself as well as he could, and made known his mission.

"Hugh Sinclair!" The old man's brow cleared at once—he made a cordial apology. "Forgive an old man, sir. I thought I recognised your face, and mistook you for some one else. I beg to thank you for the trouble you are taking to help in the success of the evening."

It was the Squire. We had not seen him before, for our coming to this cathedral town was recent, and he seldom or never came to church.

"I very much approve of your programme, sir," he continued. "The songs are English; I hate your German and French: the tendency is a bad one, to put aside our own fair tongue and our own sweet tunes. I particularly like these old friends, 'Bid me discourse,' 'Where the Bee sucks,' and so on. But whom have you here to sing them?"

Hugh explained that his sister had a fine voice, which he had taken pains to cultivate.

"But she is only a child," he said tenderly. "About seventeen, eh, Dot?"

The Squire turned and looked at me, and the frown came back to his brow.

"Very strange," he muttered. "Her face also is quite familiar to me. What does it mean?"

"Oh, I am like anybody and everybody," I admitted, clumsily enough; "but when you see Betty, I am sure you will say you never saw anyone like her in your life before."

"Betty sings," suggested Hugh, as the frowning Squire looked

suspiciously at my dark face. Then Hugh bowed and passed on, and the Squire catechised me as to our family in a very pertinent or impertinent manner.

But before I had given him much information I heard Betty calling, and ran back through the conservatory with only time for a short farewell to the Squire.

"I've seen the Squire, and he's the very counterpart of Hugh in everything except age, only not so kind in his manner," I said, breathlessly. "I never saw such a likeness."

Hugh came rushing in at this moment to reprimand me for leaving the room.

"Let me tell you, Dot, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. I am ashamed of you," he said severely. "This room is specially given up to you, and you've no business to go wandering about."

If it had not been for Betty's kind look at me I must have wept.

"Do let Dot enjoy herself in her own way," she begged. "The Squire can't eat her, at any rate."

Hugh was very nervous about the concert, and I could see that his rock of strength was Betty. If she grew nervous, too, and failed, his prospects would be worse than ever; for everybody of note for miles round was here to-night. His keen eye searched her face. Betty looked up with her sweet child eyes, very dreamy here within hearing of the plash of the fountain, and with the wealth of flowers on which to feast her beauty-loving soul.

"Are you—are you—well, Betty?" stammered Hugh. He did not want to make her think he feared she would be nervous. Betty laughed. She was always well. Then Hugh went into the next room, and I followed as near as I dared. The door was now open into the conservatory and people passed and re-passed.

"I did not know St. John was a musical man," said a passer by.

"Nor is he. I met him on the heath an hour ago: he said he was going to shirk the first part of the concert."

"But, I tell you that I saw him a moment ago in the gallery directing the men where to put the piano."

"Then he must have returned in a prodigious hurry. But come, let us go back and see who is right about it."

Presently they came past the door again.

"He's just bluffing us," said one. "As if I don't know my own eyes. I have not sat opposite to St. John at mess for two years without knowing what he's like. And he's the image of the old Squire into the bargain."

Hugh came in soon after this, frowning in his most distant manner.

"There are some lunatics here," he said, "who declare they know me. I had the greatest trouble to keep them from dragging me off to the billiard-room; and you know I never played a game of pool in my life. One of them declares I owe him his revenge. They must mean it for a practical joke, but it is very ill-timed."

He went off, and presently we heard him at the piano. He opened the concert with a fine piece of his own composition. Some part songs followed, which gave satisfaction; and then Hugh came hurriedly for Betty, and told me I might find a hiding-place amongst the palms in the conservatory if I chose. As soon as they were gone I glided amongst the palms, until I found a spot whence I could watch Betty; that was all I cared for. To my surprise, however, Hugh came in at a door the other side of the conservatory.

"Hugh, do you want me?" I asked softly. He took no notice whatever of me, for his eyes were fixed upon the stage, where Betty was standing waiting for the accompanist. As he drew near I saw it was not my poor, over-anxious brother, but a man of fashion and leisure who knew what it was to be very much bored in life. But I forgot about him in a moment, for Hugh took his seat at the piano, and played a short prelude, to give Betty time to collect her strength in case she felt very nervous. And there was my lovely Betty, standing in her usual simple, graceful way beside him, with her music rolled up in one hand, for she never needed to look at her notes. That was one of the charms of her singing—it seemed so spontaneous.

As she stood waiting to begin, there was a stir throughout the audience; people simply stared with wonder at this delicate vision, radiant with loveliness. Betty's soft rings of corn-coloured hair curled all over her head, her cheeks were rosy with health, and I read in her eyes that she saw nothing of the brilliant assemblage; her thoughts were far away in the song world, where, she declared to me, she could hear divine, long-drawn chords, and a choir of singers with voices true as silver bells.

"Oh, Betty," I cried to myself, "wake up and do your best, my Betty;" and as though my thought compelled her glance, her eyes met mine, and she woke. Then she sang; but who shall describe the clear bell-notes that thrilled and rang through the room? The audience became distracted, and when the last sweet note died away, they applauded Betty to the echo and would not be satisfied. I shall never cease to see her standing there in the rich old gown of crimson and gold and blue. She only wanted the trumpet to be seraphic as one of the Fra Angelico's angels, floating on billowy clouds. Then Hugh played a slight prelude, and she sang her "bird song," trilling in the upper register with the facility many a great singer might have envied. After this, people were crazier than ever, and made such a noise that I heard a growl beside me. The man so like Hugh was standing, white and stern, just as Hugh was apt to look when indignant.

"Poor little girl, they will frighten her," he said, and moved swiftly away to the concert-room. He spoke to some of the crazier ones in a very decided manner, and silence ensued, and the next moment he came back to the conservatory with our Betty following him, bathed in tears. Some of the audience had crowded round her and

frightened the poor silly child. And no sooner were they well out of sight of the room than Betty clung to him with both arms, and laid her soft, curly head against his shoulder. She had never once looked up at him.

"Oh, Hugh; dear Hugh, have I not done enough? Must I go back and sing to those dreadful people again? Please say I need not, Hugh. Indeed, you don't know how it hurts me, Hugh, through and through."

By this time I had taken my Betty from the stranger, and I dare-say I looked horribly disagreeable, but before I could speak he made a sign that I should not tell Betty of the mistake she had made, and he stood aside to let our own Hugh come up.

"Need I sing again, Hugh," said Betty, and the real Hugh, looking down tenderly at her, said fiercely:

"If I had known they would have behaved like that, my little Betty, you should never have entered these doors. It is too bad of them, though they mean it for kindness. The truth is, your singing has taken them out of themselves. But you have sung enough, and shall go home, if you like. I can't come with you, but, Dot, you can take her home, can't you?"

"Allow me the privilege of taking care of these ladies," said Hugh's double, stepping forward. "It is only fair, for this concert is given in my honour. My uncle——."

"Then you are Major St. John?" said Hugh, questioningly.

"Yes; and you are Hugh Sinclair, a fine composer and true musician, I hear. Rely on me to take the greatest care of your song bird, here."

And with this Hugh left us, and we were led away into a cool part of the gallery, close to the flowers and fountains, and refreshments were brought to us.

When Betty was less agitated she looked curiously at the Major, who was so like yet so unlike our Hugh. He, in his turn, seemed intensely interested in us, or rather, I should say, in Betty.

"I want to know where you found this beautiful gown," said he, as her ruby gown, open in front, fell back over the blue quilted under-skirt.

"In the garret," said Betty simply. "It belonged to my mother, and is our great grandmother's wedding-dress."

"You do not know what this ancient dame's name might have been?" he suggested.

"No, I don't know anything more about the gown," said Betty.

"Once upon a time," said he, "I heard of a merry young girl, who finding an old dress in the garret, precisely like this, dressed herself in it for a fancy ball, and looked so lovely in such quaint attire that her doting father had her picture painted as she looked that night. Will you come with me—I will show it you."

We followed him across the corridor to a long gallery, and there,

sure enough, my Betty, with her corn-coloured curls, was smiling at us from the walls, and the ruby, gold and blue setting was identically the same.

"What is the meaning of this masquerading?" said an irate voice beside us. We turned and saw the Squire, livid with emotion; I thought anger.

Betty looked at him, and a smile came into her eyes of irresistible loveliness.

"You are just like Hugh," said she eagerly.

He did not reply. He simply stood and glared at us.

"I have already solved the puzzle," said the Major very quietly: "as," he added, more slowly, "no doubt you have done also. You cannot look at that young man's face without seeing what is patent to the least observant in the room—he is your living image. You cannot glance from the pictured loveliness on the wall to the face below without seeing that a lineal descendant stands there. As to the dress—if further proof were needed——"

But as he spoke the Squire seemed to pounce upon our little Betty. In a moment he had her under the lights and was holding her face, looking searchingly into her eyes. His own eyes glared so fiercely that I should have screamed with terror; our gentle Betty, however, trusted everyone, or read them as a child would do. She looked in the old man's face and smiled.

"Oh," she said again. "You *are* just like Hugh. I never saw such a likeness."

"What is her name?" he said, in a kind of strangled voice, turning to me.

"Elizabeth," I gasped; "but we call her Lady Betty. She has our mother's name because she is just like her."

No one spoke after this. The old man breathed almost in sobs, and the Major signed to me neither to move nor speak. But I trembled for Betty; she was used to comforting us all, even Hugh in his darkest moods; she seemed to divine our needs, and she could not bear to see anyone suffer without giving her utmost of consolation. To her simple, true mind, only one thing at a time presented itself. So now she bent her head, and laid her cheek against the hand that held her so fiercely. The touch was the gentlest caress; and the next moment, the old man was holding our Betty close in his arms, a rain of tears falling on her soft rings of curls.

The Major had drawn me away to the other end of the gallery, and here we sat down and stared at one another. I felt very much inclined to cry myself, and had a short struggle which ended in an undignified choke.

"Hugh told me to take her home," I said, a little crossly. "She ought not to stay any longer."

And the Major, looking straight at me, said:

"Little girl, you *are* at home. The picture on the wall is that of

your mother, dressed for a fancy ball in the old ancestral gown. She made a run-away match with a singer, and your grandfather's heart was broken at her loss. She was as proud as he, and would never make an effort to conciliate him. She even kept him ignorant of the fact that she had any children. Her husband, I imagine, changed his name to Sinclair, since you are called thus, so all traces of them were lost. Failing other heirs, I was to inherit the estate here, but with your Hugh, as you call him, present, I am a nobody, only your very far away cousin, Major St. John, and your very faithful friend. I shall retire very willingly, for, with my own large estates to manage, I did not want any more upon my hands."

With these words he rose, and we went back to the sofa where my Betty was sitting, right under the picture of our mother. The old Squire was hanging over her, unable to keep his eyes from constantly comparing the living with the pictured face.

"Well, sir," said the Major cheerily; "you must not make invidious distinctions; here is another claimant on your affections; a good, true little soul, to whom I am sure you will give a corner of your heart."

"Oh, I am only Dot," I said hurriedly, fearing again that scowl of dislike I had watched gather on his brow. I got out of sight, clumsily enough, but the Major drew me forward.

"She is like her father, you think? Dear uncle, now on Christmas Eve, with the 'Glad tidings of great joy' ringing in your ears, ought you not to forgive and forget?"

The Major's eyes dwelt meaningly on our lovely Betty, and I know he meant that a gift such as that ought to fill the old Squire's heart to overflowing. I was so pleased that I suppose I smiled as my grandfather looked at me.

"She has a look of her mother when she smiles," said he, and he held out his hand cordially. From that moment my grandfather and I have been the best of friends.

But Betty and I were left alone in the gallery, while the Major and our newly-found grandfather walked arm-in-arm, up and down the corridor beyond.

I heard the Major's strong, earnest tones again and again.

"It *must* be, dear uncle, and at once."

The Squire seemed much grieved, and threw his arm about the young man's shoulders.

"You *can't* leave me the estate now," said the Major again; "Hugh Sinclair has a far greater claim upon it. But there is one more precious jewel that now belongs to you, which I must gain your consent to win. I believe in love at first sight, and from the first moment my eyes fell upon her I felt that I had met my fate." And the glance of both rested on our Betty, who had wandered back to the further end of the gallery, standing dreaming amidst the flowers. What a lovely picture she made there, in her quaint, rich gown, with

the old lace falling over her white arms, and her yellow curls against the background of palms.

"She is only a child as yet," said the Squire jealously.

And the Major laughed as they entered the gallery.

"Come," he said to me. "We are going to make a sensation."

Hugh was playing a fine piece when we came into the concert-room. Our grandfather, leading Lady Betty, calmly ascended the stage, the Major followed with me.

Hugh looked up wrathfully. He was very much displeased to see us brought back to public view again. He made one crashing discord and then rose hastily.

"Dot, I told you to go home," said he severely.

But ere I could speak the Squire had taken him by the arm, and was speaking to him. Then he drew him unwillingly to the front of the stage, and in a few words explained to the assembled company that we were without doubt his grandchildren, restored to him wonderfully and unexpectedly, and that if this were satisfactorily proved, Hugh would become his heir.

Of course we were surrounded in a moment, and I think the ladies would have smothered Betty had not my grandfather stood between her and the many determined to seize and kiss her. Little notice was taken of me, which of course gave me time to see what others were doing.

The Major had Hugh by the arm, and Hugh, haughty as usual, did not make himself half so agreeable as he might have done; but then he was very much bewildered at the sudden change in his position, and proud—well, I am sure, if he had not thought more of us than of himself, he would never have taken a penny from the estate. When people moved away, I heard the Major say softly to Hugh:

"Be good to the old man, cousin Hugh. He has had many a lonely year with his broken heart."

The two men took a long look into one another's eyes, and then their hands met in a handclasp which promised friendship unto death.

Hugh and our grandfather took wonderfully to one another, and the Major watched their growing interest with keen delight. But—well, I must say it, for everyone knows it is the truth—nothing, and no one in the world will ever be to grandfather what Lady Betty is.

The Major had thought of the others, too, and presently he went away and came back with our two eldest, Bessie and Letty. But what was said then I do not know, for we were sent to bed, and slept in a large room where, I am sure, a thousand ghosts might have wandered. For the Squire would not hear of our going away again that night, but insisted upon our remaining, as if he feared that if he let us go he might lose us again for ever. But when I said to Betty that the place might be haunted, she only laughed, and danced about on the old oak floor, her ruby dress flashing here and there aglow in the fitful flames.

"After all, we owe everything," said she, "to the Great Grandmother's Wedding Dress."

## LIFE'S CLOSING YEAR.

He smiles with scorn to see the children sport
In careless joy,
Unheedful of the emptiness of life—
Of life's alloy.
"The gold of happiness, a merest grain
To gild the show—
The mocking, fading pageantry of all
This scene below!
And what above? 'Tis fools alone who trust
That vain conceit;
As if the laurel chaplet were stretched out
To crown defeat."
Thus speaks the man whose youth has owned no law
But its own will;
Whose age still drinks, but drinks with thirst unslaked,
At folly's rill.

The hoary head a crown of glory is,
If it be found
In paths of righteousness, the Preacher saith—
A truth profound!
Look at the grand old veteran in life's war
'Gainst self and sin,
Decked with the stars and crosses that the brave
Alone may win—
Crosses and stars that tell of noble deeds,
Of pain endured,
Of steadfast purpose, and of victory
At last secured.
Is there not glory in the tale thus told?
Shall we not bow
Reverent before the crown of righteousness
On Age's brow?

The year of life is as the natural year;
Each season brings
Its own advantage and its fitting toil;
And he who flings
Reckless away his chances and his time,
In winter's frost
Sees blankly, down the vista of past days,
That all is lost.
We reap for ever as we sow; and they
Who plant but tares
Must miss the harvest of the wholesome grain,
So surely theirs
Who plough with care, and scatter precious seed,
Water and wait:
Each one is master, by Divine decree,
Of his own fate.

E. Rhodes.

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The Argosy

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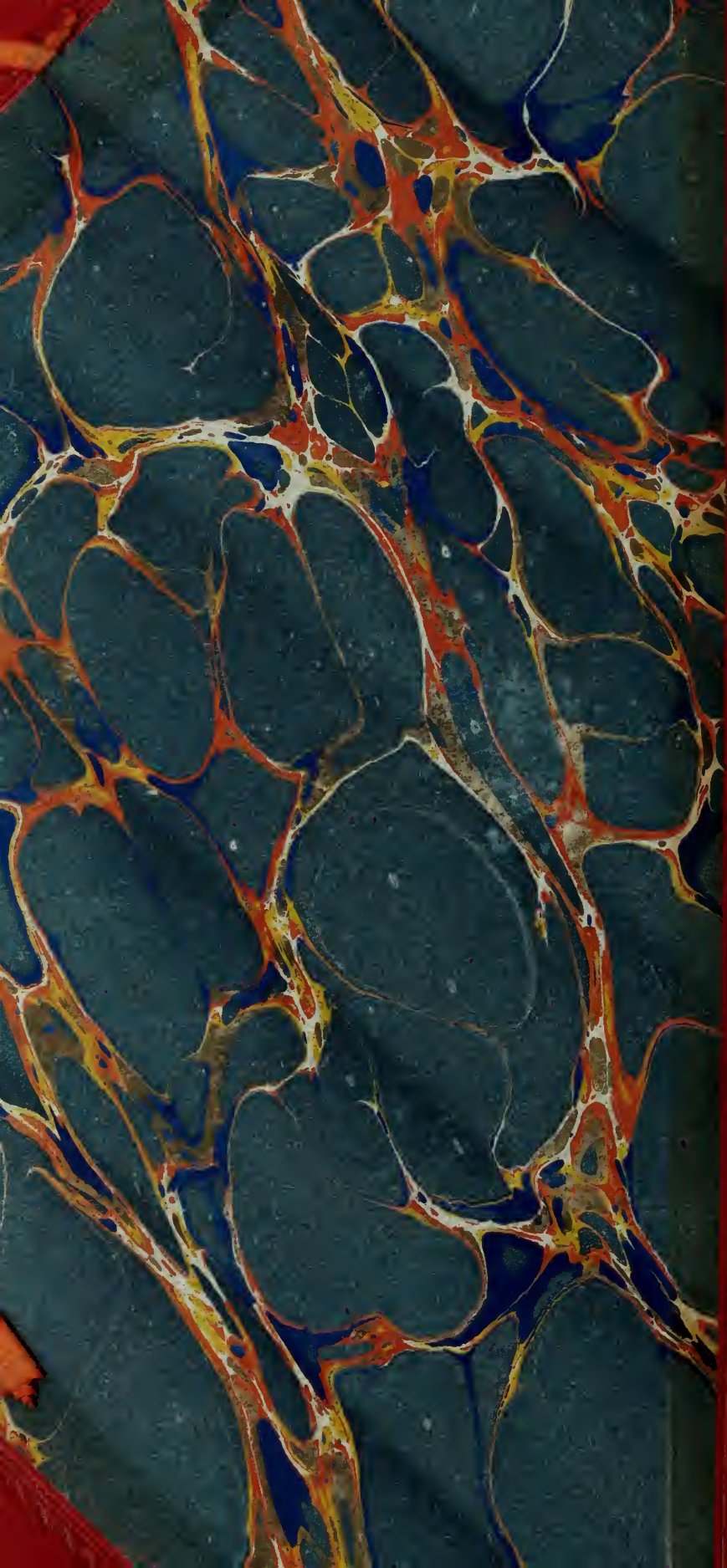
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